CRIME BUSTERS

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GREAT DETECTIVE STORIES

10¢

APR. 1939

MURDER IN WAX

By MAXWELL GRANT

ALSO STEVE FISHER - W. T. BALLARD
THEODORE TINSLEY - AND OTHERS

ALL STORIES COMPLETE

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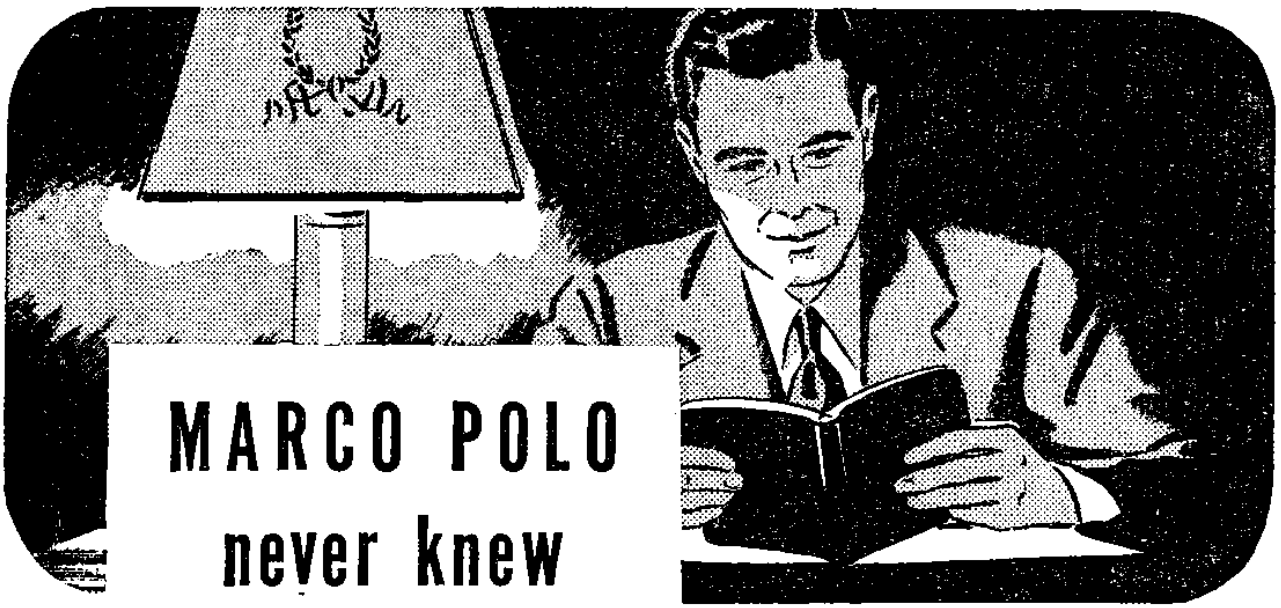

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All characters used in fiction and semi-fiction stories in this magazine are fictitious. Any similarity in name or characterization to persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

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From The Editor

ONE of our recent letters in regard to the Norgil stories which are written by Maxwell Grant sets the tone of a great deal of our mail—that is, that Maxwell Grant must know his magic and his professional magicians real well in order to be able to make his character sound so much alive. (Murder In Wax, page 9). Well, there's really no great trick to it; you just have to live the part in order to be able to write it, and Maxwell Grant is no mean shucks as a magician himself! In fact, he has appeared with many big stage shows in his time, has performed himself as boss of his own show, and rates among his best friends almost every practicing magician today.

Recently, when Harry Blackstone, who is probably the greatest living magician on the theater stage today, was in New York, we were busy planning some future work with Maxwell Grant when Mr. Blackstone's manager asked whether we would like to have a bit of supper. Of course we would, so we hied ourselves to Ruby Foo's Den, in the West Fifties, and had a bit of delicious Chinese food, followed by an impromptu performance of magic which not only had this poor editor baffled, but brought the waiters from all other tables to surround Mr. Blackstone and watch his skill.

And, begging leave of Ruby Foo's management, we will state here that as Mr. Blackstone called names of cards and other objects in Chinese, most of the Chinese waiters answered in their own dialects, with the exception of one who looked somewhat baffled by the strange words. When Mr. Blackstone asked him what specific dialect he talked, one of the other waiters volunteered the information that this friend was born in Brooklyn, and didn't understand *any* Chinese! It sounds like a story, but that's just how it happened!

About the same thing holds true of Alan Hathway's Keyhole stories, one of which appears in this issue. The newspaper atmosphere and information in these stories *should* be obsolutely accurate, because Mr. Hathway has been in newspaper work all his life, in various parts of the country. Right now he is make-up editor of the New York *Daily News,* which paper has the largest newspaper circulation in the entire world. Having worked in practically every department in newspapers, from small country weeklies to his present connection, there is very little about papers that Mr. Hathway has missed, so he can make his newspaper characters sound just as if they really lived. As a matter of fact, we find that most writers base their fictional characters on some real person who comes pretty close to their heroes, but that's something that editors cannot always learn. Perhaps the Keyhole worked side by side with Mr. Hathway at one time, who knows?

You'll find the "Mr. and Mrs. Sherlock Holmes" story, by Richard Hobart a delightful change from the regular run of detective stories, with

two characters who are really very human and likable. If you think enough of them, let us know and we'll see if we can't get Mr. Hobart to give you some more of their adventures.

W. T. Ballard treats you to another swell Red Drake story, "Suicide for Killers," in this issue, and Lester Dent and Steve Fisher give you two fine novelettes. Clickell Rush, Lester Dent's gadget man character, has an especially strong appeal to our readers, because most of us do like to fool around with gadgets and things, and have plenty of ideas along the lines of Click Rush's inventions, except that we never get the time to carry them out. Seeing some one else do that, and likewise make use of them, therefore gives most people a special kick! There will be another gadget man novelette in the next issue, too.

Frank Gruber came in, several months ago, with an idea for a Jim Strong story that seemed to be so much under his skin that we got curious. Gruber's story, therefore, came out: He had taken an apartment in one of the newest apartment houses in the city, all fixed up with modern furniture and everything, and figured he had found a real place after all. Then, all of a sudden, a piano and a saxophone started blazing away—and kept going for hours and hours. Of course, a party is a party, and we all must put up with them some times, but this one kept going for so long that Gruber got curious. There was no party. The apartment immediately below was occupied by a musician and a composer, and between the rehearsal and the playing of tunes which the composer was writing, this kept up all the time. As one creative artist to another, Gruber swears that he tried to stand it as long as he could, but enough was enough, so he moved out, and wanted to cap it by writing a swell yarn about a music racket. When an author gets that worked up over a subject, the best thing to do is to help him along. We did succeed in keeping the assorted types of mayhem swirling around in Gruber's mind out of the story; in fact, it turned out to be a fine tale about a music racket, and has no reflection whatever upon musicians and composers. That, we convinced Gruber, should be a personal matter between him and his unknown friends downstairs. But you readers will get a real story out of it if you look for "Song of Death" in the next issue.

Our next issue's cover will illustrate a Carrie Cashin story, "Tin Soldier." It is a fine piece of workmanship as a cover, equalled only by the quality of the story which Theodore Tinsley gives you about our interesting girl detective. Carrie has become the favorite character of our readers, both men and women alike, that's why you see her in these pages so often. And Alec, her big, handsome partner, seems to be liked by the men as much as by the women, and we wondered, at first, whether our male readers might not resent his position. Looks like they don't, for he proves himself quite a man whenever it's necessary. Wonder whether he'll ever get nerve enough to tell Carrie just what he's been wanting to tell for her a long time?

I jumped from $18 a week to $50 -- a Free Book started me toward this GOOD PAY IN RADIO

HERE'S How it Happened

by S. J. E.
(NAME AND ADDRESS SENT UPON REQUEST)

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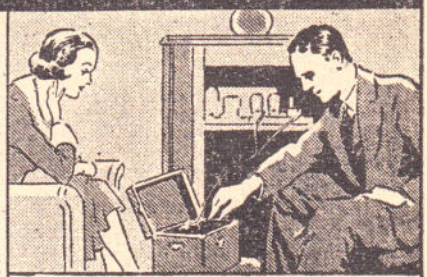
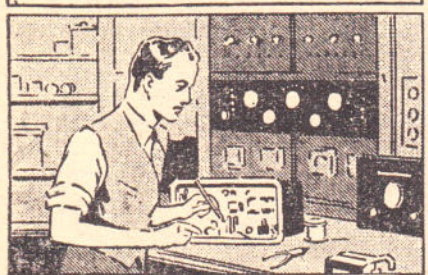
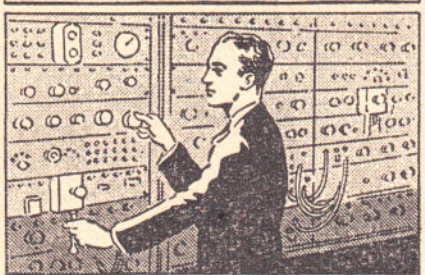


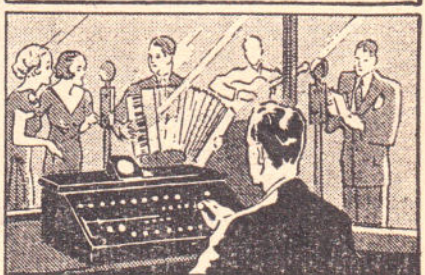
"The training National Radio Institute gave me was so practical I was soon ready to make $5, $10, $15 a week in spare time servicing Radio sets."



"When I finished training I accepted a job as serviceman with a Radio store. In three weeks I was made service manager at more than twice what I earned in the shoe factory."



"Eight months later N.R.I. Employment Department sent me to Station KWCR as a Radio operator. Now I am Radio Engineer at Station WSUI. I am also connected with Television Station W9XK."



"N.R.I. Training took me out of a low-pay shoe factory job and put me into Radio at good pay. Radio is growing fast. The field is wide open to properly trained men."

J. E. SMITH,
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Find out today how I Train You at Home to BE A RADIO EXPERT

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Radio broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, station managers and pay up to $5,000 a year. Fixing Radio sets in spare time pays many $200 to $500 a year—full time jobs with Radio jobbers, manufacturers and dealers as much as $30, $50, $75 a week. Many Radio Experts open full or part time Radio sales and repair businesses. Radio manufacturers and jobbers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, engineers, servicemen, and pay up to $6,000 a year. Automobile, police, aviation, commercial Radio, loudspeaker systems, are newer fields offering good opportunities now and for the future. Television promises to open many good jobs soon. Men I trained have good jobs in these branches of Radio. Read how they got their jobs. Mail coupon.

Many Make $5, $10, $15 a Week Extra in Spare Time While Learning

The day you enroll I start sending Extra Money Job Sheets; show you how to do Radio repair jobs. Throughout your training I send plans and directions that made good spare time money—$200 to $500—for hundreds, while learning. I send you special Radio equipment to conduct experiments and build circuits. This 50-50 method of training makes learning at home interesting, fascinating, practical. I ALSO GIVE YOU A MODERN, PROFESSIONAL ALL-WAVE, ALL-PURPOSE RADIO SET SERVICING INSTRUMENT to help you make good money fixing Radios while learning and equip you for full time jobs after graduation.

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Act Today. Mail the coupon now for "Rich Rewards in Radio." It's free to any fellow over 16 years old. It points out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television; tells about my training in Radio and Television; shows you letters from men I trained, telling what they are doing and earning. Find out what Radio offers YOU! MAIL COUPON in an envelope, or paste on a postcard—NOW!

**J. E. SMITH,
President,
Dept. 9BD,
National Radio
Institute,
Washington,
D. C.**

J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 9BD
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Smith: Without obligating me, send "Rich Rewards in Radio," which points out spare time and full time opportunities in Radio, and explains your practical method of training at home in spare time to become a Radio Expert. (Please write plainly.)

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Address .....

City..... State.....

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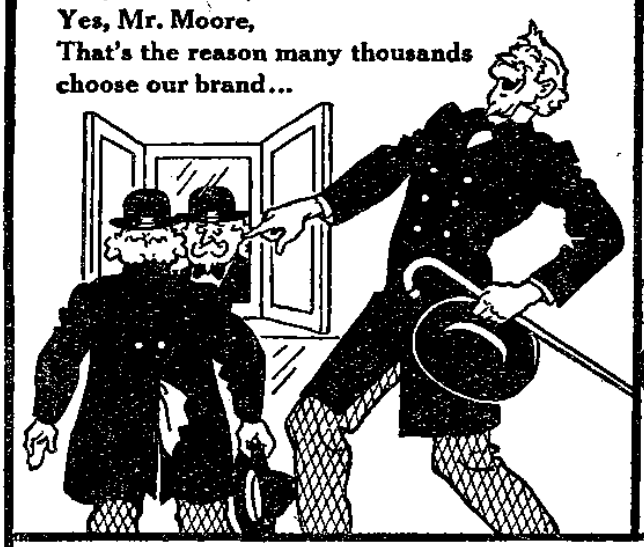
"Oh, Mr. Mattingly,
Oh, Mr. Mattingly,
The way folks praise our
whiskey makes me blush...

"'What a brand!' 'A peacherino!'
'M & M is really keen!' Oh,
Is it 'cause we slow distill
and never rush?"

"Yes, Mr. Moore,
Yes, Mr. Moore,
That's the reason many thousands
choose our brand...



"Coast-to-Coast and Gulf-to-Border,
M & M is what they order,
It's a royal-tasting whiskey,
at a price that gets a hand!"

IF YOU like a whiskey with that good, old-fashioned flavor... you'll like Mattingly & Moore.

You see, M & M is ALL whiskey ... every drop in every bottle. More, M & M is a *blend of straight whiskies*... the kind of whiskey we think is best of all!

Ask for M & M at your favorite bar or package store... *today*. You'll be delighted with the fine, mellow flavor that slow distilling gives it. And you'll be delighted, too, with its amazing *low* price!

Mattingly & Moore

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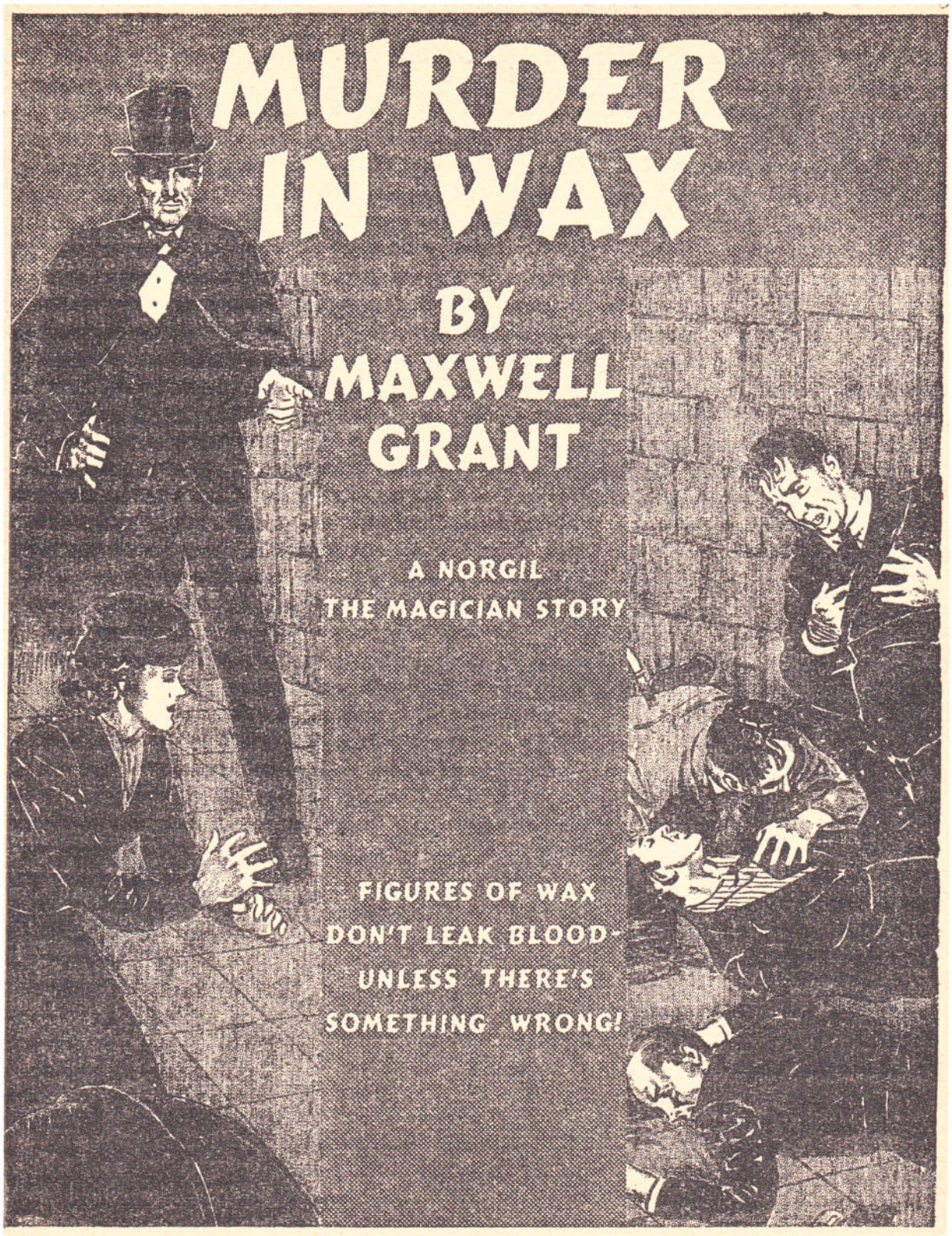
Frankfort Distilleries, Incorporated, Louisville and Baltimore.



CHAPTER I.

DROPS OF BLOOD.

PAUSING in his regular evening stroll along Fifth Avenue, Norgil admired the jade pendants in Clafley's window. They were exquisite, those pendants, of the apple-green hue that marked them of the best variety. They were also tagged with a price that brought them within reason.

Miriam Laymond liked jade. Next Wednesday would be her birthday,

installing the exhibits. That can't be done until the decorators have finished."

Norgil nodded. It was still summer, and he knew that workmen were busy every night, completing the Musée. Despite delayed construction, Wier had insisted upon opening the place on schedule.

"Your ten weeks' booking still stands," added Wier, "if that is what is troubling you, Norgil. If necessary, I can run for an entire season at a loss. If you run short on rabbits"—he chuckled and tossed the kitten to Norgil—"use this!"

Wier's cheerful mood was contagious. Norgil's smile increased as he politely replaced the kitten on the desk and strolled from the office. He was ready to work for a chap like Wier. When the manager saw the show tonight, he would like it better than ever.

SIXTY minutes later, Norgil, attired in a dress-suit, was in the middle of his show, receiving the plaudits of a small but enthusiastic audience. Fish bowls were appearing from silk foulards, girls vanishing from flimsy cabinets, to the weak melody of a four-piece orchestra.

It was a good show, up to Norgil's best standard, even though he had clipped the size of his company because of the small stage. It was worth the five hundred dollars a week that Wier was paying. And business had shown a slight improvement. Not enough to suit Norgil, for there were only a few hundred people in the audience, but that was better than the same night a week ago.

Wier probably knew the New York audiences, so that left the problem up to him. Noting Wier at the back of the little theater, Norgil observed that the gray-haired proprietor of the New Musée looked quite as satisfied as before.

Norgil was glad that Wier had arrived in time to see the closing act—the levitation scene. Miriam stepped forward, charming in her Hindu costume, and Norgil, starting a series of pretended hypnotic passes, found himself looking at eyes that he had long ago conceded were the loveliest that he had ever seen.

How serious Miriam's eyes were! They always had that sober look at this stage of the show. But Norgil, solemnly straightening his lips to the line of his mustache, could picture those same eyes sparkling, fairly dancing, on next Wednesday night.

Stiffening, Miriam fell straight back into the waiting hands of Fritz, who, with another turbaned assistant, helped place the brunette on a couch, while Norgil was reminding himself that he must not forget to buy the jade pendant as soon as Clafley's jewelry store opened in the morning.

As the orchestra provided the soft strains of "Lieberstraum," Miriam's prone figure rose from the couch. Gracefully poised in midair, she seemed lifted by some invisible force that carried her to a height of six feet, when, at a motion of Norgil's hands, she remained suspended, motionless.

Fritz brought a ladder and a large hoop. Ascending the small steps, Norgil passed the hoop about Miriam's body from head to foot. Then slowly, dramatically, he was about to descend the small ladder when he happened to glance again at Miriam's eyes.

The girl's gaze was focused upon

and there was no gift that she could appreciate more than those pendants. Out of ten thousand dollars' worth of jewelry in the bulletproof window, and probably twenty times that amount in the vaults of Clafley & Co., Jewelers. Miriam, given free choice, would still prefer jade.

Unfortunately, it all depended upon how this week turned out. Maybe Norgil's salary check wouldn't be forthcoming. There was an easy way to settle that question—take it up with Harmon Wier. There was still time to discuss the matter before the nine o'clock show, for a five-hundred-dollar clock in the jeweler's window gave the time as half past eight.

With a whimsical smile upon his mustached lips, Norgil turned the corner just past Clafley's and stopped at the first building on the side street, where a neon sign shone above the arched entrance:

NEW EDEN MUSEE

Norgil couldn't shake off the thrill that gripped him, as he went up the steps and through the entrance of the waxwork museum. He had never forgotten his boyhood recollections of the original Eden Musée, on Twenty-third Street, where many famous magicians—de Kolta, Powell and Dunninger, among them—had played prolonged engagements.

That link with the past was the reason why Norgil had accepted Wier's offer to appear at the New Musée. Norgil couldn't resist the proposition when Wier told him that the place would have all the tradition of the famous old museum—and the proprietor had made good his boast.

Passing the turnstile, Norgil chuckled at sight of an attendant dozing in a chair. That chap, like another who stood lifting his hand and pointing, were both mechanical figures made of wax. So, too, was the rural gentleman who was gawking at a sign which said *"Beware of Pickpockets"*—while a dummy "dip" was lifting a fat wallet from his hip pocket.

On Norgil's right, as he walked through the main hall, was another large room filled with waxworks, while on his left was the little theater where the magician gave his show. Straight ahead was a grand staircase; below it stone steps leading down into the fearful Chamber of Horrors, which filled the entire basement.

Ascending the grand stairs, Norgil came to the curtained entrance to the Hall of History. To his right was the room where the automatic chess player was housed along with other mechanical marvels, while to his left was a passage leading to a door marked *"Office."* Norgil rapped at the office door.

A cheery voice invited him to come in.

Harmon Wier, gray-haired and long-faced, gave a smile when he saw Norgil. When Wier smiled, it meant that he was satisfied, for his face was normally quite solemn. Tonight, Wier was stroking a very frisky Maltese kitten that gamboled about the flat-topped desk, attracted by two playthings—a pencil, and a fancy string that girded a big bundle of programs.

Norgil sat down in a chair opposite. Declining a cigar that he wouldn't have time to smoke, he asked:

"How's business?"

"Improving steadily," replied Wier. "As well as we could expect, considering that the season hasn't really begun, and we haven't finished

the ceiling above the stage. There was fascinated horror in her eyes, something that Norgil had never witnessed among all their varying moods.

Before he could divert his gaze from Miriam's face, something splashed upon the girl's right hand, raised somewhat above her breast. The girl's face winced. A shiver seized her body.

Norgil saw the blob arrive. He looked, identified it against Miriam's hand—a drop of blood!

Again a crimson droplet struck. By the time that Norgil was down the ladder, a third globule of blood had fallen. His eyes raised upward, Norgil sighted the source—a reddish patch that was oozing through the ceiling.

His hands on the move, Norgil was ordering Miriam toward the couch. In response, she was floating downward at the same graceful speed with which she had risen. But that pace, to both Norgil and the girl, had become a painful slow-motion.

For Miriam's descent from that berth in midair was accompanied by the steady *drip-drip* of the raining blood, that seemingly could betoken nothing less than the passing of a human life!

CHAPTER II.

WANTED—A CORPSE.

"STEADY—"

Norgil undertoned the single word, and his whisper, though vaguely distant, was soothing to Miriam's ears. She steadied.

In fact the girl's quiver had ended after that first drop of blood had struck. Miriam had nerve, and plenty of it, enough to steel her through many an ordeal. But it had taken all her effort to restrain herself until she heard Norgil's tone.

With that, Miriam let her eyes go half shut, and waited patiently to reach the couch. Somehow Norgil's voice carried a magic charm, for the girl could no longer feel the frightening warmness of those pelting drops.

Norgil knew why. The drip of blood had ended before Miriam settled on the couch. When she reached there, Norgil gave a signal for Fritz to close in the curtains. The moment that was done, he whipped out a handkerchief, wiped the blood from Miriam's hand as he brought her, half dazed, to her feet.

The levitation act was not the usual finale, but the audience took it that the show was over, judging from the wave of applause that came from beyond the closed curtains. Miriam was on her feet, nodding, forcing a smile as Norgil asked:

"Ready for a bow?"

Fritz parted the curtains. The magician took a bow, holding the hand and arm of his lovely assistant.

Miriam was as pale as one of the Musée's waxwork figures, but the spectators were not surprised. Some supposed that the girl's pallor was due to the hypnotic influence that had caused her to float in midair; still, Norgil could hear a slight murmur as the curtains again closed.

"Some of them saw those drops," he said grimly. "Then: "How are you, Miriam? All right?"

"Of course." The girl shuddered, then showed a genuine smile. "If the show's over, I think I'd better get dressed."

"A good idea."

As Miriam left for her dressing room, Norgil pointed out the blood-stained ceiling to Fritz and told his

assistant to hurry out and summon Wier.

"After you've started Wier back here," added Norgil, "stick around in the main hall and see who goes out."

It wasn't long before Wier arrived. He was in his solemn mood, anxious of gaze as he asked:

"What's happened, Norgil? Why have you cut the show short?"

Norgil pointed to the ceiling, and showed Wier the bloodstained handkerchief. Wier stood horrified as he wiped his forehead with a handkerchief of his own. Then, in sudden alarm, he exclaimed:

"My office is directly over here. That . . . that blood, or whatever it is, must have come from there!"

"I know it," returned Norgil. "We'd better go up and have a look."

AS they hurried up the grand staircase, Wier explained breathlessly that he had left the office unlocked. There had been nothing of value in the room; he couldn't understand why any one would have gone there. Hand on the doorknob, Wier couldn't find enough strength to turn it. Norgil pushed him aside and yanked the door wide.

The Maltese kitten turned its head from the flat-topped desk and gave a welcoming pur. Norgil took quick strides across the floor, stopped short beyond the desk. Wier joined him there. Both stared at the thing they saw.

A bottle of red ink lay on the floor. Its cork was gone, the red fluid had formed a pool. Much of the ink had flowed into a crack in the floor. Wier gave a grateful gasp.

"The kitten!" he exclaimed. Then, managing to regain his smile: "I should have known what it was. The only ink I've been using is red, because so far we've been losing money. What's more, the cat was starting after that bottle last night. I should have remembered it."

Norgil joined in a chuckle. He and Wier were soon laughing heartily at their mutual mistake. Going down to the theater, now emptied of its audience, Norgil crossed the stage. As an aftermath to his comedy, a blob of red ink descended from the ceiling and struck his face. Norgil was wiping it away as he met Miriam, who had hastily dressed.

"Nothing but red ink," explained Norgil, "so don't be alarmed."

He told her the details of the discovery, and Miriam gave a relieved laugh of her own. Norgil suggested that she go out and bring Fritz, as there was no use to watch for the exit of an imaginary murderer. As the girl was leaving, Norgil added:

"By the way, get me one of the programs. I meant to pick one up when I came in. Only be sure you talk to one of the real attendants, not a dummy—like you did the day when we arrived here."

When Miriam returned she had a program, but she had to apologize because it was rumpled.

"They're all out," she explained. "This program is one that somebody left in a theater chair."

Norgil nodded. He began to finger through the program. Suddenly he turned to Fritz.

"We might as well check up," said Norgil. "You didn't see any one suspicious go out, did you?"

Fritz shook his head.

"Where were the customers going," questioned Norgil suddenly. "after they left the theater?"

"About everywhere," replied Fritz. "Some went across to the big exhibit room; a lot of them went up to the Hall of History. Then there were a dozen or more who went down to the Chamber of Horrors."

"Did any go up to look at the automatic chess player?"

"Yes—several."

Norgil dismissed Fritz with a nod. The assistant went to get dressed, but Miriam remained as Norgil sat down upon the levitation couch. Miriam had noticed what Fritz had not. Norgil's forehead was wrinkled; a new seriousness had come to his face. He saw the girl, but she did not disturb his thoughts. Instead, Norgil began to voice his ideas aloud.

As Miriam watched, he brought the red-stained handkerchief into the light. Unfolding it, the magician studied the trophy, and said slowly:

"It still looks like blood."

Silently, Miriam agreed. The drops had been warm, like blood. The handkerchief bore a deeper dye than any that ink could have caused.

"Which means that there should be a corpse," resumed Norgil seriously. "The body isn't in Wier's office. It could not have gone out through the exit. It couldn't be in any of the exhibit rooms"—he was spreading the program with the floor plan of the New Musée—"except—"

Norgil shook his head.

"How it could get there is also a mystery," he added, "but we're going to have a look"—he paused, watching Miriam's face—"in the Chamber of Horrors!"

CHAPTER III.

THE CHAMBER OF HORRORS.

MIRIAM accepted Norgil's decision quite calmly. In fact, her eyes showed eagerness at the magician's suggestion of some solution to the mystery. Then came her puzzled question:

"But how could a body have gotten there? Wier's office is above here, isn't it? And the Chamber of Horrors is in the basement—"

"I know all that," interposed Norgil. "But we're going to check up just the same. Let's do this neatly, Miriam, without anybody knowing where we've gone."

The task was not overdifficult for people who could distinguish real museum attendants from the dummy ones. There were still enough customers in the place to keep most of the attendants busy. Watching from the theater doorway, Norgil and Miriam spied their opportunity, and reached the stairs to the Chamber.

Hollow whispers greeted them as they descended the stone steps. The tones came from a few of the patrons who were still going the rounds, for voices carried far in the vaulted passages below. There was a regular route through the Chamber of Horrors, which every one followed. Hence, by keeping to the rear, the new visitors would not be noticed.

But as they started along the blue-lighted corridor, Miriam suddenly gripped Norgil's arm. Despite the fact that this was her first visit to the Chamber, the girl wasn't frightened. She merely thought that they were discovered.

"Look . . . here comes an attendant—"

Norgil smiled at Miriam's exclamation. He told the brunette to watch. The "attendant" approached at jerky pace, went past them, stare-eyed. As his foot struck the end wall past the curved steps, there was a *click*. The attendant wheeled around, to retrace his steps.

"A robot!" exclaimed Miriam. "I should have known it from the way he moves along, then stops."

"Electrically controlled," ex-

plained Norgil, pointing to metal strips that the figure followed, "but not enough juice to give anyone a shock. Wier paid fifteen hundred dollars for that figure, and got a bargain. Also"—he smiled in recollection—"he picked up a novelty that the original Musée didn't have."

Paced by the robot, they started through the Chamber of Horrors. At every exhibit, Norgil paused and studied the program by the bluish light. Miriam gazed in fascination at the fearful things on display.

SHE saw a life-sized elephant in wax, stamping a Hindu criminal's head. There were torture scenes in medieval dungeons; a portrayal, in all-too-realistic wax, of a sultan decapitating a slave with a scimitar.

During their pauses, the robot completed his trip to the other end of the horseshoe shaped corridors, and passed them on his return.

"Only three exhibits more," announced Norgil, "then we come to the exit—a maze with turnstiles that confuses people when they go out, to reach the other stairs."

"What are the exhibits?" asked Miriam.

"First, the Chicago massacre," Norgil read from the program, "the one that took place on St. Valentine's Day. Then, Marie Antoinette on the guillotine. Finally, Bluebeard's secret room—"

He stopped as the robot arrived, overtaking them. Lifting the figure from its tracks, Norgil leaned it against the wall. He wanted to study the St. Valentine's Day massacre, where wax figures of gangsters lay riddled by machine-gun fire.

Checking the names from the program, Norgil stepped closer and beckoned to Miriam. As she looked at the dozen or so figures slumped at grotesque angles, Norgil suggested:

"There is one too many. Tell me which one it is."

Miriam studied the exhibit, then pointed.

"Why," she gasped, in an astonished whisper, "one of the group is stabbed . . . not shot! Look . . . the knife handle is in sight, in his back—"

The full tragedy of the discovery made Miriam pause. It dawned on her why Norgil had suggested the Chamber of Horrors. Despite its location, the Chamber was the one place where a dead man could be openly stowed by someone in a huge hurry.

Norgil was stooped beside the figure that showed the knife handle. From the way the magician handled it, the body was not wax. The dummies, as Miriam knew, were very light; but Norgil could scarcely shift the form of the stabbed man.

AS Miriam watched, she saw the glint of the knife blade, then a fresh ooze of blood, quite different from the painted, frozen crimson that adorned the other figures. That body, the corpse of a real man, was the one that had dripped blood from the floor of Wier's office down through the roof of the stage, to spell its message on Miriam's hand!

As Miriam gripped the hand in question, feeling an imaginary return of the damp warmth, Norgil went through the dead man's pockets. His results seemed nil, until he came to one vest pocket. There, his fingers produced a small, folded slip of paper.

Miriam chanced to turn away as Norgil looked about. Thinking that the girl had not observed the find, the magician deftly spread the slip,

noting it as he put it in his own vest pocket. Rising, he faced Miriam with almost a questioning gaze.

About to ask if he had found anything, Miriam caught the question before it reached her lips. She knew that Norgil would have told her, had she inquired, but she preferred to wait and learn the reason for the secrecy.

"It's our man, all right," decided Norgil. "Who he is—who killed him—how he got here—we'll have to learn all that later. Right now we're going upstairs, not through that trick maze, but by the way we came in."

Calmly, he put the robot back on its track, sending it toward the inner wall. Soberly, Norgil and Miriam went out through the long, deserted

The statue of Belshazzar handed her the cup!

passages, where the bordering exhibits of wax no longer seemed things of horror. They found another chance to ease out from the stairway, and went back to the theater. There, Norgil politely suggested that Miriam go to her hotel —that he would telephone her later.

"In a little while," smiled the girl. "I have a few things to pack and take along with me."

Norgil went to his dressing room. Soon Miriam, peering from her own door, saw him cross the stage. Hurrying into the magician's room, the girl found the vest of his dress suit. In the pocket she discovered the folded slip of paper.

Typewritten, it bore the brief and cryptic statement:

H. H. 11:30 P. M.

CHAPTER IV.
THE DOUBLE SURPRISE.

When Norgil came back to get the precious slip that he had forgotten, Miriam was gone. The magician talked to some attendants, telling them that he was shipping in some crates with new magical apparatus; that the truck would arrive in about an hour. Harmon Wier had given Norgil a written order to the attendants, telling them to wait and unload the shipment.

Norgil left. More than half of the hour was gone when Miriam stole suddenly from the darkened theater and ran squarely into one of the attendants. Thinking quickly, she asked:

"Is Mr. Wier still in his office? Mr. Norgil wanted me to see him."

"I think that Mr. Wier left," replied the attendant. "But you might try his office."

Miriam went up the grand staircase. At the top, she looked down. The attendant was out of sight. Quickly, the girl slipped through the curtains into the Hall of History. The place was empty.

Calmly, Miriam strolled about, viewing a waxwork Napoleon at St. Helena, a kingly Cæsar refusing a royal crown, and a great many other interesting exhibits.

Glancing at her wrist watch, she finally noted that the time was twenty minutes past eleven. How the thoughts linked, she didn't guess, but suddenly the meaning of the dead man's message came to her.

"H. H." meant Hall of History. Something was to happen here at half past eleven!

Norgil wanted her to be safe. That was it, of course. Naturally he hadn't shown her the message. But Miriam had her own idea of loyalty to Norgil. She decided to stay and see what happened. In a corner she saw a door marked, *"Storeroom."*

Opening it gingerly, Miriam started back at sight of peering faces. Then she laughed. They were only waxwork dummies, extras, not yet placed on exhibit.

The closet wouldn't be a good hiding place. But it struck Miriam that anyone looking there would not notice one more dummy. She had another idea, and a good one. On a platform at the back of the hall were a group of waxworks, representing Belshazzar's Feast. Beside the bearded king who sat upon a stately throne, was a female cupbearer clad in short tunic and scandals. The waxwork girl happened to be a brunette, like Miriam.

Urged by her own inspiration, Miriam carried the light figure to the closet. She removed the tunic, which covered one arm and came just below the other, then took the sandals that were on the figure's feet.

Stowing the dummy deep among the others, Miriam glanced at her wrist watch.

The time was 11:25. For a moment Miriam hesitated, then, determinedly, she began to remove her own clothes. Though she worked rapidly, she managed to keep calm, until she had nearly disrobed. Then she was seized by mad panic at the realization of her possible predicament—if she did not complete the change within the next few minutes.

FLINGING the last of her garments to the floor, Miriam grabbed for the tunic and started to put it on backward. Hurriedly correcting that error, she finally snapped the single shoulder buckle, and quickly slid the sandals onto her bare feet. Shoving her own clothes deep on a closet shelf, she was about to scamper out to the platform, when she remembered that Babylonian damsels did not wear wrist watches. Unclamping the band around her wrist, she added the watch to the garments on the shelf.

Reaching the spot beside Belshazzar's throne, Miriam felt her heart thump so loudly that she thought the sound would carry throughout the entire hall. At last the pit-pats lessened; she felt calm again. A long minute passed. There was a stir from the entrance curtains.

People came into the hall. Miriam recognized them, as persons who had been in the audience during the show. They totaled six; five were men, one was a woman. They clustered near the platform where Miriam stood as motionless as the waxwork figures. They didn't notice anything amiss.

Nor did Miriam, until a dry voice spoke at her very elbow:

"You may take this cup, Miss Laymond."

If Miriam hadn't been petrified, she might have jumped right out of her Babylonian costume. A hand plucked Miriam's arm, bringing her about. Belshazzar handed her his cup.

Astonished, she reached mechanically to receive it. Then, rising, the ancient king plucked off his beard, revealing himself as Harmon Wier.

Throwing aside his robe, Wier displayed his usual clothes beneath. The grinning members of his mob had drawn revolvers. Miriam was covered by the circle of guns, as Wier seized her arm roughly and drew her down from the platform.

"I had to croak Jarvey," he told the rest. "He came to the office ahead of time, with his usual hints for more than his cut out of the dough as a price for keeping his trap shut."

Pleased mutters approved Wier's admission of murder.

"Norgil suspected something," continued the killer. "So he planted this dame here, to look in on us. Only she didn't figure that there would be two of us playing the dummy act."

Laughs greeted Wier's sally. Miriam bit her lips, more in humiliation than in fear. She heard Wier inquire if the trucks had arrived.

The reply was yes, and that the attendants were closing the place for the night. Turning to the one woman member of the band, Wier gave an order that concerned Miriam.

"You keep this dame covered, Boots," he said, "until I get back. We're going down by the back route."

PULLING away a curtain in back of the Belshazzar group, Wier pressed a panel. When it came open,

Miriam saw an elevator. She realized, then, how easily Wier had removed the body from his office. With everyone at Norgil's show, he had slid out at first signs of the dripping blood. He had carried Jarvey's dead form through the Hall of History and taken it down to the Chamber of Horrors.

At Wier's order, one of the crooks went to the closet, found Miriam's clothes on the shelf and took them along with him when he joined Wier and the other men in the elevator. Then, the car was gone and Miriam, still biting her lips, was wishing that she had chosen one of the ample Eskimo costumes that she could see on the Admiral Peary platform, rather than the three-piece outfit—one tunic and two sandals—which she had picked for her present dilemma.

She hadn't been forgotten, however. Soon the elevator returned. Wier was its only passenger, except for a kneeling waxwork figure that was clad in a long black dress. Wier shoved the figure from the elevator and made a mock bow.

"Introducing Marie Antoinette," he said. "You're going to be a queen, Miss Laymond." Then, turning to the girl with the gun, he added: "I'll be back in five minutes. Make her hurry the change and put the cup-bearer figure where it belongs, in case any of those boob attendants come in here before they go home. Let her do all the work, so you can keep her covered."

Wier went back into the elevator, and Boots promptly poked Miriam with the gun, telling her to get busy. Knowing that Wier was coming back, Miriam did not stall.

Fuming at her own folly, she transferred her Babylonian costume to the dummy in the closet, and carried the cup bearer to its proper place on the platform. Taking the dress from the Antoinette dummy, she put it on, and added stockings that she found with the figure. Antoinette's shoes, however, were too narrow.

"Forget 'em," snapped Boots, "and put the dummy in the closet. Make it snappy. Here's Wier."

Flanked by two guns, Miriam descended in the elevator, feeling, she decided, much as Marie Antoinette must have felt while on the way to the guillotine. That sensation was justified, when they reached the Chamber of Horrors. There, Wier told the black-gowned girl to kneel behind the guillotine and place her head beneath the ax. Miriam obliged, there being nothing else to do.

"Look along there"—Wier pointed down the blue-lit passage—"and see old Simon Legree, ready to take a whack at Uncle Tom. We stuck the Legree dummy up near the top of the maze, where nobody goes, and the guy you see is real.

"He's our lookout. And besides, if he thumps that whip down, it will hit the plate that controls this guillotine. You'll be a real martyr"—Wier and Boots were locking Miriam in place, while the big-shot made his threat—"if you just try to make a squawk.

"Maybe all the attendants have gone; maybe they haven't. We're not bothering them, because they're on the level. I'm using them for an alibi. I'm telling you this because you'll never blab. You can still hope for the best"—he chuckled—"which will be that the mob will take you along—with the swag!"

That verdict given, Wier motioned to Boots. Together, they headed for the deep end of the pas-

sage; while Miriam, her face motionless but very pale, let her eyes turn to watch them.

Norgil would have liked those eyes more than ever, had he seen them. For the expression that they bore was one of hope that the magician, known for his skill at performing the impossible, would somehow come to Miriam's rescue.

CHAPTER V.

FINISHED CRIME.

FROM that moment on, Miriam could scarcely believe the things that happened. Yet happen they did, exactly as she saw and heard them. At moments, she understood clearly, but there were intervals when all seemed a dream, induced, perhaps by the cold blue glow and peculiar acoustics found in the vaulted Chamber of Horrors.

First, Wier and Boots went to the last exhibit in the row, one past the exit that led through the mystic maze. Miriam hadn't noticed that exhibit before. It was the one that represented the famous Bluebeard's secret room.

The scene was an interior view. A dummy figure representing Bluebeard, stood gloating at the sight of hanging heads—all suspended by their hair. Beautiful heads, as Miriam saw them, with every shade of hair. They gave her the shivery thought that if someone interfered with Wier, her own head would be loose like those.

That, in a way, steeled her to watch what happened next. Since the exhibit showed the interior of the secret room, the background naturally had the locked doors which Bluebeard's wives, as represented by the heads, had been told never to open. Harmon Wier was taking the privilege of Bluebeard. He was opening the doors.

Beyond, Miriam saw a roughhewn passage, like an extension to the Chamber of Horrors. Wier's crew was coming through it, stacking bags in front of their chief. Wier opened one bag, dipped his hand in it. His fingers trickled jewels.

That passage led to Clafley's jewelry store! That was why workmen had still been busy in the New Eden Musée! The waxwork exhibits, on which Wier was losing money, made the "front" for a clever scheme to burrow into one of Manhattan's greatest storehouses of gems, and rifle the place clean!

Wier was looking in Miriam's direction. She let her eyes stare straight ahead. The sound of footfalls made her fearful, until she heard Wier laugh. It wasn't a real attendant that was coming along the passage. It was the robot, on his electrical track.

The mechanical creature halted close to Miriam. Its glassy eyes stared dully into hers. Then the thing was on its way again, jerkily advancing through the hazy blue light. It struck the wall, came back. Following its course, Miriam saw that Wier and Boots had moved into the tunnel along with the rest. Then she watched the robot going back along the passage, until her eyes bothered her. Staring straight ahead, Miriam resigned herself to the guillotine.

Mechanical paces halted; jerked ahead. They faded, and finally began their return. There was no other sound along the passage until Miriam heard a whisper that might have come from anywhere, thanks to the vaulted roof. It said:

"Look at Simon Legree!"

Before doing that, Miriam took a

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CARRIE CASHIN, THAT LOVELY, FEARLESS GIRL SHAMUS, BREAKS UP THE NIGHTMARE OF
TERROR ISLAND
BY THEODORE TINSLEY

Terror Island

CHAPTER I.

THE POCK-FACED MAN.

"THERE'S the island now," Mark Patten said.

He lifted his hand briefly from the seaplane's controls and pointed toward the watery horizon.

Aleck, who was sitting next to Patten, couldn't see anything at first except the gray of the late afternoon sky and the darker mass of the ocean. Presently he made out a small patch like a smudged thumb. It notched the skyline seven or eight miles off the coast of Maine.

Patten gunned his seaplane to greater speed.

He was a tanned, handsome man who looked more like a professional pilot than an artist. The plane was his own, a four-place cabin job. Carrie Cashin sat in a rear seat behind Aleck. Mark Patten had flown them swiftly from New York. There was worry in the artist's eyes.

"I hope your mystery blonde makes another raid tonight," Aleck said. "There's something intriguing about a gal who answers to the name of Flip. And a gal who can pump bullets out of a big blue gun while she treads water in the Atlantic Ocean—she sounds promising. It ought to be a pleasure to snap handcuffs on her. Am I right, Carrie?"

"You're always right," Carrie said demurely.

Mark Patten didn't pay any attention to her. He took it for granted that she was Aleck's secretary. He didn't realize that this pretty chestnut-haired girl in the tailored jacket and tweed skirt was the most successful woman detective in New York. Patten had gone to the "Cash and Carry" agency because it was tops in crime detection. He didn't know that "Cash and Carry" was an amusing reversal of the name Carrie Cashin. She allowed Aleck to front for her because most clients had a silly prejudice against women detectives.

The island on the horizon began to draw closer.

Patten rented the place every year from a New York theatrical man named Bruce Stoker. Stoker had gotten sick of it because it was too far from New York to attract weekend guests. But to Mark Patten, it was a perfect spot to work without interruption. He was a painter of seascapes. Critics predicted that he would soon match even the genius of Winslow Homer.

Patten had borrowed two of Winslow Homer's paintings from the Museum of Art on an artist's loan. He used them for study in pigments and technique. Both those paintings were priceless. That was why Patten had hired Aleck and Carrie Cashin.

He didn't want those borrowed masterpieces stolen by the pock-faced man and the blonde named Flip.

The day before, Patten had surprised the blonde coolly searching his cottage when he had returned from the mainland with a plane-load of supplies. For a burglar, she was rather strangely dressed. All she had on was a one-piece bathing suit and a rubber zipper bag slung about her neck. She vaulted through the open window of the cottage's living room and raced like a bare-legged Olympic champion to the rocky shore line of the island.

By the time Patten got there, the blonde was a blur of foam three-

quarters of the way out to a drifting motorboat.

Patten hopped to a boulder and hollered, "Hey!"

It was then that the blonde did her water-treading act. She yanked a big blue gun out of the rubber bag. Every time it roared, the recoil pushed her head under water. But she kept the gun high and spaced her shots damned fast. Three slugs chipped the boulder. Patten dived behind the rock on his belly.

He watched the head of a pock-faced man rise unexpectedly above the gunwale of the motorboat. He had pale, fishy eyes and the homeliest face Patten had ever seen outside of a dog show.

The pock-faced man yelled harshly, "Come on, Flip! Make it snappy!"

The blonde swung a dripping leg into the boat and the rest of her streamlined figure followed it promptly.

"Keep your shirt on, Porky," she snapped at her companion. "Get your engine going!"

The boat went away in a drone of high power. It vanished through a foggy haze in the direction of the Maine coast.

Mark Patten raced back to his rented cottage and made sure that his two museum paintings were still in his locked safe. Then he ran to the cove and took off in his seaplane. But it was too late. After zooming in and out of a dozen Maine inlets, Patten gave up.

But he didn't entirely waste his time. He went ashore and saw a man about a dog. The dog had long flat ears and a nose for scent. Patten flew him back to the island and tied him close to the safe. The next day Patten had hired Aleck and Carrie.

THE seaplane banked and descended to the lee of the island.

The water was choppy and unpleasant. The island seemed nothing more than a desolate blur of trees fringed by spray-swept rocks. But Patten taxied his seaplane into a hidden cove behind a small stone breakwater. By the time the ship was moored, dusk had deepened into darkness.

Patten snapped on an electric torch. It showed a faint path that wound through spruce and pine.

"The cottage is in a hollow," he said. "You can't see it from here."

The trees thinned presently. They could see a clearing beyond. They could also see the house.

At sight of it, Aleck muttered, "Uh! Uh!"

Carrie didn't say anything. She pivoted away from the beam of Patten's flashlight. A swift upward tug of her tweed skirt exposed for an instant the blur of shapely legs. Just above Carrie's left knee was a garter holster. The pistol was a tiny thing, a flat palm gun. But when Carrie straightened, the muzzle looked damned businesslike.

So did Aleck's .45.

Patten gasped, "What's the matter?"

Aleck pointed. There were lights lit in every room of the house. But Patten didn't seem dismayed.

"I turned 'em on myself before I flew to New York. I thought it would keep crooks away. I forgot to tell you."

A long, mournful howl cut his words short. It came from the house. It made Carrie think of Eliza crossing the ice.

"That's Bosco," Patten explained. "The dog I bought. He always howls when he runs out of dog biscuits. I left him some in a tin pan, but he must have eaten 'em."

The cocksure calmness of the artist began to annoy Aleck.

"Bosco couldn't be barking at burglars, of course?"

"Not a chance," Patten said. "Bosco is tied to the safe in such a way that if anyone opens the door it releases the dog. You can see I've got things under control."

"Yeah," Aleck said. "Now if you'll just explain why the hell you had to fly two detectives all the way up here, when you've got everything so nicely under control—"

Carrie Cashin pinched Aleck and shut him up. The case sounded screwy, but that was the very reason she had insisted on taking it. She had a weakness for cases that didn't make sense. Besides, Mark Patten had paid a fat fee in advance.

"Let's go in and have something to eat," Carrie suggested demurely. "I'm glad there's no need for gunplay. I'm as hungry as Bosco!"

Aleck noticed, however, that she didn't replace her palm gun in her tricky garter holster. He held on to his own .45 while Mark Patten opened the cottage door and led the way into the living room.

IT was a cheerful room with a high-beamed ceiling and a wide fireplace. But the man who bounced up from the sofa at their entrance looked far from cheerful. There was a scowl on his dark, saturnine face.

He advanced on the startled painter with clenched fists.

"Look here, Patten! I want to know why in the hell—"

He halted suddenly. Aleck had pushed Patten aside. He leaned gently against the dark-faced intruder. Something round and hard made a dimple in the man's vest.

The man looked down, saw the .45 and said, "Urk!"

"Stick 'em up, stupid!" Aleck said.

"Wait a minute," Patten muttered. A peculiar expression flickered into his eyes. "There must be some mistake. This is Mr. Stoker. Bruce Stoker. He's a friend of mine. I . . . I—"

"Is he another one of those things you forgot to tell us about?"

"I . . . I don't understand," Patten faltered. "Mr. Stoker is my landlord. He owns the island. I rent the cottage from him. When in Heaven's name did you get here, Bruce? And why?"

"That's what I'd like to know," Stoker fumed. "Who is this thug with the gun? And why did you send me that fool telegram?"

"Telegram?"

"Certainly. Like an ass, I came all the way from New York to find out what was the matter. Like a bigger fool, I let the boatman who ferried me across to the island go back before I found out there was no one home. I've sat here all afternoon, listening to that dog caterwauling up in the attic—"

Aleck grinned as he listened to the plaintive echoes from above.

"—and then," Stoker concluded angrily, "you walk calmly in here after dark, with an armed thug and his gun moll—"

"I'm sorry," Patten said with a thin laugh. "We seem to be all mixed up. These people are detectives. I hired them to investigate an attempted robbery of some valuable paintings I've taken on loan from the Museum of Art."

"What the hell has that got to do *with me?* Why did you make me travel all the way from—"

"Perhaps we'd better have a look at the telegram," Carrie Cashin suggested quietly.

It was a curt, urgent message. It

had been filed at Eastport in Maine, the nearest big town to the island.

AM IN SERIOUS TROUBLE STOP NEED YOUR HELP STOP TROUBLE INVOLVES YOU AS WELL AS ME STOP COME AT ONCE IF YOU WANT TO PROTECT YOUR OWNERSHIP OF ISLAND PATTEN

Mark Patten shook his head dazedly when Carrie showed him the telegram.

"It's a fake. I never sent it. I wasn't anywhere near Eastport yesterday."

"I thought you said you went there to buy a watchdog," Carrie said.

"Not to Eastport."

"That's queer," Bruce Stoker said in a suspicious tone.

"What's queer about it?"

"Eastport is where I got off the train. I was puzzled about that alarming telegram. So I stopped off at the telegraph office and spoke to the clerk. He remembered the man who sent it. If it wasn't you, Patten, then it certainly must have been your twin brother. The clerk even remembered the mole on your forehead."

Patten's hand jerked quickly to the mole and then dropped slowly away.

"I've told you I wasn't in Eastport. The clerk is either a liar or a crook. Good Lord, Bruce, you know me better than that! Why should I want to lure you out here with such a preposterous message?"

"This telegraph clerk at Eastport," Carrie asked Stoker. "He wasn't a pock-faced man, was he? With pale, bulgy eyes?"

"No. He was a tall, nice-looking kid. About twenty. Sandy hair and dimples. What's all this stuff about paintings and a burglary?"

CHAPTER II.

"FOLLOW MY LEAD!"

PATTEN explained while Carrie went upstairs and investigated the top floor and the attic. She found no trace of burglars. All she found was Bosco, yowling hungrily at the end of a rope that tethered him to the door of a steel safe. The attic seemed a queer place to keep a safe, but Patten had explained that earlier. It was dry and warm up there. It lessened the chances of the valuable museum paintings becoming damp or moldy in the sea air that blew across the island.

There was a box of dog biscuits on a shelf, and Bosco quieted down when Carrie tossed him a few. He didn't seem to be very ferocious.

The safe was an old-fashioned affair with a primitive type of lock. Carrie began to wonder if it actually contained anything of value. Patten's story of the paintings taken on loan from the museum began to seem as phony as the telegram that had brought Stoker to the island on a wild-goose chase.

Carrie called the artist and Aleck upstairs and made Patten open the safe.

It proved that he had told the truth in at least one respect. There were two oil paintings in the safe. Both were gorgeous masterpieces of gray sky, sea and wind-tossed ocean. Both were signed with the famous name of Winslow Homer.

Aleck scratched his head after a quick glance at Carrie.

"If the crooks were after these, why didn't they crack the safe while you were away? They had plenty of time."

"I don't know," Patten said.

"Could they have been after anything else?"

"There isn't anything else. Just

some groceries, my art supplies and some clothes in my bedroom closet."

"How about the cellar? What's down there?"

"There isn't any cellar," Patten explained. "The cottage is built on concrete walls flush with the ground."

"O. K. Let's go downstairs and see what Stoker has to say."

Stoker had nothing to say, except to verify that the cottage had no cellar and that none of his rented furnishings seemed to have been stolen.

"In other words," Aleck said sourly, "a blonde in a bathing suit just broke into the house for a little light target practice with a big blue gun! Porky came in the boat just for the ride. I've got a notion—"

What his notion was, Aleck didn't have a chance to say. His jaw gaped suddenly as he turned toward the living-room window. It was lifted from the bottom, leaving a gap between the sill and the lower edge of the shade.

Through that gap an ugly face was peering—a pock-marked face with unpleasantly bulging eyes.

ALECK'S gun whipped out as he sprang toward the window. But quick as he was, Porky was quicker. The bullet from the thug's pistol split the air where Aleck's head had been an instant earlier. The only reason it didn't bury itself in Aleck's brain was because Carrie Cashin's palm gun sent a slug crashing through the window, driving Porky backward and spoiling his aim.

The next instant Porky was gone. They could hear the thud of his feet racing away through the darkness.

Aleck had flung himself hastily to the floor. He rose with a yell and darted toward the window. Carrie was close beside him, her voice an urgent whisper at his ear.

"Dive out fast! We're both life-size targets against the light!"

She drew back while Alack jumped to the dark turf below the level of the window. Over her shoulder, Carrie caught a quick glimpse of Patten and Stoker. The artist was racing up the stairs, shouting something about his dog. The owner of the cottage had burrowed behind an armchair and was peering dazedly at the bullet-shattered window.

Carrie dropped beside Aleck on the damp turf. It was pitch dark outside and very quiet, except for the brisk rustle of wind through the trees. Aleck hadn't moved an inch. He was listening intently, trying to catch some sound that might indicate in which direction the murderous Porky had fled.

It was no use. Porky was too wise to be trailed that easily. He must have slowed down as soon as he reached the protection of the woods.

Aleck snapped on his pocket torch. Carrie grabbed it quickly and held it herself. She was taking the deliberate risk of drawing a bullet, but there was method behind her reckless action. She knew that Aleck's .45 would carry faster and further than her own palm gun. She held the flashlight well away from her body, as she advanced fearlessly toward the woods that hid the rocky shore of the island. Aleck walked a dozen feet to the left, his big gun ready for action in case he saw the flash of Porky's pistol.

But Porky didn't fire. He had vanished without trace.

IN a few moments Carrie and Aleck stood on the rocky shore line of the island, drenched with spray from the rolling surf. No man could

have swum through such a wild smother of foam without being sucked back to the rocks and dashed to death.

Yet Porky's footprints had led across the clearing in this direction, before they had faded out on the thick carpet of leaves beneath the trees.

A shout drew Carrie and Aleck back from the shore of the island. Bruce Stoker was halfway through the woods, holding Patten's flashlight in a trembling hand. Patten had the watchdog from his attic.

The dog's nose was flat to the ground, his haunches stretched and quivering. Evidently Bosco had found a hot, fragrant scent. He almost tore away from Patten in his whining eagerness.

They followed Bosco's lead, tripping over tangled roots, plunging through bushes that whipped backward at them like thorny snakes. It was evident what Porky had done. He had doubled on his tracks the moment he had reached the cover of the woods. The dog followed his trail away from the shore line and across the island.

"Toward the cove?" Carrie whispered in Patten's ear.

He shook his head. "No. Cove's over in the other direction. He's heading for more rocks and surf. We're bound to catch him now!"

But that was foolish optimism. The trail ended suddenly. Bosco halted with a quick, strangled bark. Then he began to run round and round in a dizzy circle, snarling and yowling as if he had gone completely insane.

He seemed determined to keep this up all night.

Aleck beat the bushes thoroughly in a fifty-foot circle. Carrie helped him. But they found no trace of the fugitive. Stoker sent the beam of his torch up into the trees, outlining trunks and branches with a daylight glare. There was no spot aloft where Porky could have hidden without detection.

It was the dog that gave Carrie Cashin the answer to the riddle.

Bosco's frenzied yowls were sounds of pain. Carrie examined his nose while Patten held the frantic animal tight. Bosco's nose was tender and inflamed. Carrie bent quickly to the ground and rubbed her fingers on the damp grass. When she straightened, there was a smear of yellow on her fingertips and a hard anger in her clear voice.

"Powdered mustard! Bosco's nostrils are raw with the stuff. This trail is dead. It's no use going any farther unless we try to search every inch of the island."

"There's something damned funny about all this," Stoker muttered.

Carrie Cashin thought so, too.

"What's funny about it?" Patten said. "It proves what I already told you. Porky is after those paintings in the attic. He came back tonight to get them. He'd found out I had bought a dog and he brought the powdered mustard with him in case we tried to hunt him down with Bosco. It looks plain enough to me."

"What about the blonde—the girl in the bathing suit?"

"She probably waited somewhere with a boat. As soon as Porky ruined the dog's scent, he raced across the island and joined her. By this time they're both heading back toward Maine."

Patten seemed ready for further talk, but Carrie stopped him with a curt murmur.

"You're wrong. Porky and the blonde are still on the island! It's part of their plan."

"What do you mean?"

"Porky showed his face at that cottage window deliberately. He didn't have to. He knew we were there! Why didn't he wait in the darkness outside and steal the paintings after we went to bed? Because he wanted to lure us away to make things easier for the blonde. The minute he threw Bosco off his trail, he doubled back to that cottage to join Flip!"

"Right!" Aleck growled.

HIS big body pivoted. He crashed through the tangle of bushes, making a path for Carrie who darted close behind him.

Suddenly they both halted. The ground under their feet was quivering like an earthquake. They could feel the force of a distant concussion through the soles of their shoes.

Before Aleck could utter a word to Carrie, the roar of an explosion shattered the quiet darkness like the rumble of thunder.

For an instant there was stunned silence. Then a queer glow began to tint the sky above the tops of the trees. It was like the faint, rosy pink of dawn. It deepened swiftly to a vivid glare of orange.

Fire! Flames were staining the night sky from the end of the island where Mark Patten's cottage stood!

Aleck was in motion instantly. But fast as he was, Carrie Cashin was ahead of him.

Branches ripped at her eyes. Her tweed skirt tore against thorns. The exposed root of a tree tripped her and sent her sprawling. She was up in an instant, careless of the fact that her silk stockings were a shredded mess; that both her bruised knees were skinned and bloody.

Her automatic pistol jutted from her clenched right hand. It was steady, like the tight, resolute line of her lips.

She emerged from the tangle of trees and bushes into the clearing behind the cottage. To her amazement no roaring crackle of flames greeted her. The house was entirely unharmed!

But the glow in the black sky was stronger. It came from behind the hill, that rose like a hump between the house and the sheltered cove where Mark Patten had landed from the air.

The seaplane!

With Aleck at her heels, Carrie raced up the winding path that led over the brow of the hill.

One glance at the cove and she realized with sick despair that there was nothing she could do. The seaplane was a blazing torch from stem to stern. The explosion that had started the fire had ripped the motor loose from its housing. The cabin was a spouting cloud of greasy smoke filled with myriads of whirling red sparks. The wings were a network of blazing struts. They twisted and writhed like the exposed bones of a skeleton.

Before Carrie could reach the shore of the cove, both wings were gone. They were sucked down into the water like the heavy engine. All that was left was the dwindling flame of the fuselage. It fell apart and vanished with a hiss under the cold waters of the cove.

"Good Lord!" a voice muttered at Carrie's ear.

It was Mark Patten. He was standing behind Carrie in the sudden darkness that had followed the final disappearance of the blazing seaplane. Carrie turned her electric torch on his face and studied him sharply. He blinked in the bright light. He seemed dazed by the disaster.

"This is why Porky lured us out into the woods," Aleck growled.

"He wanted to get at that seaplane and put her out of commission. He's stranded all of us on the island."

"What good will that do him?" Patten asked feebly.

"Where's Stoker?" Carrie interrupted.

There was no sign of the owner of the cottage. Aleck had assumed that Stoker was with Patten. But Patten disclaimed any knowledge of the man's whereabouts.

"He was right behind me when we started over the hill," Patten muttered. "He must have turned and taken the path to the house."

"He's the only one of us with any sense," Carrie snapped. "The cottage is the place the crooks are trying to keep us away from. The burning of the plane fits in with the stunt of disabling the dog with powdered mustard. Both were designed to draw us away from the paintings in the attic. We'll have to hurry if we—"

The muffled echo of a pistol shot

The seaplane was a blazing torch.

roared with startling suddenness from beyond the hill.

"Poor Stoker!" Mark Patten murmured.

He found himself talking to empty darkness. Carrie and Aleck were already racing back to the cottage. Mark Patten followed them with a surprising burst of speed. To their annoyance he kept shouting at the top of his lungs.

It ruined any chance of a stealthy sneak-up on the thug, Porky, in case he was still in the house.

But Porky was not inside. The only person in the cottage was the unfortunate Bruce Stoker. He was lying flat on his face in a crumpled heap on the living-room floor. Blood dripped from an abrasion on his scalp. It was not a bullet wound, but a bruise. Someone had struck him a quick blow, knocking him unconscious.

The safe in the attic was open. The museum paintings were gone.

TO ALECK, it meant the unhappy end of a botched case, the first failure in the brilliant career of Carrie Cashin. But when he returned glumly to the living room, he was puzzled by Carrie's apparent lack of dismay. She seemed not to mind the loss of the paintings or the anger of Mark Patten.

Patten promptly demanded the return of the fee he had paid to the Cash and Carry agency on the grounds that the money had not been earned. Carrie merely smiled. In a quiet tone, she ordered Aleck to revive Bruce Stoker.

Stoker's story only made things more confused. He had raced to the house, hoping to cut off Porky's escape. He had run pell-mell into an intruder in the living room of the cottage.

But it wasn't Porky!

"It was a girl," Stoker said feebly, wincing as he dabbed at his bruised scalp with a handkerchief. "A blonde with a gun. She didn't have a stitch on except a bathing suit. I didn't hear her behind me, because her bare feet made no sound on the hardwood floor."

"And what happened?" Aleck growled.

"I tried to grab her," Stoker said. "I didn't think she'd have the guts to shoot. That was my big mistake. She put a bullet so close to my neck that I could feel the heat of it as it whizzed by. I did a side-hop quicker than I ever did before in my life. It threw me off balance. Before I could recover, that damned blonde was at me like a tigress. She belted me over the head with the butt of her gun. I . . . I guess I went out like a light. God knows where *she* went!"

"I can guess," Aleck muttered unhappily. "The little lady named Flip is a fast worker. The minute she conked you, she lammed to the speedboat they came over to the island in. Porky was waiting for her with the stolen paintings. By this time, they're on their way across to the mainland—and leaving us stranded here like saps."

Carrie Cashin's faint smile deepened. In spite of her bedraggled appearance after that mad race through the woods, her face remained serenely lovely. Mark Patten watched her. He forgot to notice that her tweed skirt was grass-stained and torn; that a snapped garter had let one of her stockings drop in a disheveled mass around her ankle. An artist, Patten saw only the beauty in Carrie's heart-shaped face.

Aleck wasn't watching her. He was listening.

Carrie had picked up a pencil that

was lying on a table, and she was idly tapping at the polished edge of the wood. To Patten, it meant nothing. But to Aleck, trained in Carrie's methods, that aimless pencil-tapping made plenty of sense. She was speaking to him in the dots and dashes of the Morse code.

"Follow my lead!" the message said.

She laid the pencil down.

"I think you're mistaken, Aleck. There was no speedboat in the cove. If Flip and Porky were both ashore —and we know they were—the empty boat couldn't have been left safely in any other place. The surf would drive it up on the rocks and smash it. Those two crooks are still on the island—and I'm going to look for them!"

Aleck nodded instantly.

"You're right. It's a good idea. Let's go!"

Stoker rose to follow them, but his legs were still wabbly from the crack he had received on the head. He sat down suddenly in the nearest chair, his face a sickish white.

"Sorry. I . . . I guess I can't make it."

"How about you, Patten?"

The artist hesitated, then he shrugged.

"I'll stay with Stoker. He's in no shape to put up a fight if the crooks come back to the house."

"O. K.," Carrie agreed.

CHAPTER III.

PORKY.

CARRIE said nothing more until she and Aleck reached the darkness that marked the edge of the surrounding underbrush outside the cottage. Then she changed her direction with a quick: "Hurry!"

She led the way in a swift detour through the trees. It brought her circling around the clearing to a point opposite the back door of the cottage. The door was locked on the inside, as both she and Aleck knew. But one of the kitchen windows was open.

"We'll wait here for a minute or two," Carrie whispered, "then you and I are going in through that kitchen window."

"Huh?"

Aleck stared at her, keyed to renewed hope by the reckless glint of excitement in Carrie's eyes. They always sparkled like that when a tough case was beginning to break.

"Have you thought about the fact that those stolen museum paintings are insured?"

Aleck hadn't. But he did now. He remembered something that Patten had said in the Cash and Carry office in response to an innocent question of Carrie's. The Museum of Art had made Patten insure the two valuable paintings before they would allow him to take them away on temporary loan.

"I get it!" Aleck said sharply. "If they're never recovered, Patten stands to make a nice piece of profit. Plenty to split with the two thugs who pulled the actual theft."

His voice hardened.

"And Patten's got himself a perfect alibi. The paintings were stolen right from under the noses of two private detectives, brought to the island to make his own behavior seem honest and aboveboard. And another thing—"

Excitement made Aleck's words stutter.

"Why the hell didn't Porky and Flip steal those paintings while Patten was in New York hiring us? They had plenty of time all afternoon to make an easy snatch while no one was around! Yet the crooks don't show up until we're all here.

And Patten copper-rivets his alibi as an honest victim by sending a fake telegram to the island's owner and getting him as an extra witness!"

"It's something to think about," Carrie agreed in her softest voice.

She began to advance cautiously across the dark clearing, keeping close to the ground. The earth at the rear of the cottage sloped steeply, so that it was not an easy matter to reach the open kitchen window.

Aleck, who was taller and stronger, got in first. His fingers tightened on the outer edge of the sill after a noiseless upward leap. He chinned himself to knee level, turning carefully so as to make no scraping sound with his shoes. Then he vanished inside.

Carrie waited impatiently for his helping hand.

"Hurry up!" she whispered.

THERE was no answer. Slow seconds ticked themselves off. Not a sound came from the darkness of the kitchen above. Desperate at the delay, Carrie realized the grim truth. Something had happened to Aleck in that dark kitchen! He had stepped into a trap baited with an open window. Someone had slugged him the moment he had entered, knocking him cold with the same tactics employed on Bruce Stoker!

Carrie's reaction to the emergency was characteristic of a woman detective whom a police commissioner of New York had once described as "the most fearless girl I ever met in the crime-busting business."

She wasn't tall enough to reach the window by a leap from the ground, as Aleck had done. So she used a rock. She found a big one partly imbedded in the ground near the kitchen driveway. Her clutch at it broke one of her fingernails, but she loosened the rock and carried it back to the window. By standing on it, she was able to grab at the sill above after a noiseless leap.

She pulled her straining body upward.

Snap! went her second garter. But she had no time to think about ruined silk stockings. She hooked a bare knee over the sill and waited tensely, watching the darkness inside. The muzzle of her stubnosed automatic was steady in her clenched hand.

Nothing happened.

After awhile a small beam of light began to move across the kitchen floor from the blunt end of Carrie's fountain-pen flashlight. It lighted up a tub, a table near the window, a closed pantry door that led to the front of the cottage.

It showed no sign of Aleck.

A faint groan came from the direction of the pantry door. The groan was followed by the dazed mumble of a man pleading for his life.

"Don't . . . don't kill me!"

Carrie didn't repeat Aleck's fatal error of dropping noisily to the kitchen floor from the sill of the high window. Holding tightly to the window casing, she straddled between the sill and a table that stood nearby, alongside the wall. A noiseless step took her from the table to a chair. Another brought her down to the floor without a single betraying sound.

Quietly, she turned the knob of the pantry door and opened it. The pantry was dark, but not quite as dark as the kitchen. A glimmer of light showed under the crack of a door opposite. This was the door that led from the pantry to the living room.

There was no keyhole and Carrie was unable to see what was hap-

pening in the room beyond. But she recognized Bruce Stoker's voice.

She got her fingers under the lower crack of the door and pulled it gently inward. She was able to do this because it was a swinging door, built for convenience between the pantry and the dinette that formed a small angle at the rear of the living room.

She saw Stoker standing with upraised hands under the menace of a gun. The sight of Stoker's captor made Carrie's eyes narrow alertly.

THE crook was a woman! A shapely blonde with a big blue-steel gun that was aimed at Stoker's heart. She was dressed in a one-piece bathing suit that clung alluringly to her figure.

Neither the blonde nor her victim was aware of Carrie's presence at the pantry door. They stood in profile, with only a few inches between Stoker's cringing chest and the muzzle of the blonde's gun.

The angle at which they stood made the woman's gun a difficult target. But Carrie had nerves like chilled steel. As her palm gun flamed, the heavy weapon in the blonde's grasp was blown out of her paralyzed fingers by a perfect hit. She screamed and whirled. She started to dive toward Carrie, then halted at the quiet lash of authority in Carrie's voice.

"I wouldn't if I were you, Flip!"

Stoker backed away, stupefied by his miraculous rescue. His hands were still elevated in the air. Carrie paid no attention to him.

"You *are* Flip, aren't you?"

The blonde didn't reply. Her face was pale with fury. Carrie found plenty to interest her in a close scrutiny of Flip's appearance.

There was something oddly familiar about the contour of her lovely countenance. Carrie never forgot a face. She had a feeling that she had seen Flip somewhere before. But she was unable to make the quick identification that she usually did.

"What's your real name, Flip?" she asked tonelessly, hoping to make the blonde talk.

Flip tightened her lovely lips.

Carrie found the answer she was seeking in the girl's hair and eyes. The eyes were dark brown, a queer color for a blonde. It wasn't so queer, however, when Carrie studied Flip's honey-colored hair. It was darkish at the roots close to her scalp. The hair had been dyed. That was what had delayed Carrie's usually unerring memory.

She realized now who Flip was! She had seen this girl a little over six months ago—at police headquarters. An inspector had been questioning Flip in connection with one of the biggest robberies ever pulled off in New York. The inspector had hoped to pin complicity in the crime on Flip. He had failed. She had faced him then as she was facing Carrie now—lovely, tight-lipped, sullen.

Carrie Cashin didn't reveal her own thoughts. With her gun aimed at the girl, she addressed a curt question to Stoker.

"Where's Patten?"

"I don't know."

Dazedly, Stoker explained.

"I was feeling pretty rocky after you and Aleck left. Patten went out to the kitchen to get me a glass of water. He was gone so long I began to get worried. I started toward the pantry—and someone socked me. When I came to, this damned blonde had a gun on me."

"Did you see any sign of Porky?"

"No."

"That's because you're a bunch of

dummies," a voice snarled suddenly from the shadow of the staircase. "Stick 'em up—or I'll scatter a few brains around this dump!"

THE stairs were behind Carrie. A twist of her head showed her the ugly, pock-marked face of Flip's pal leaning over the banisters. Carrie had no chance to swing her weapon into action. Porky's gun rested solidly on the slant of the stair rail, its muzzle steady.

Carrie let go of her pistol, heard it thump on the rug.

"Smart girl," Porky chuckled. "Now back up against the wall! Flip, you better— Hey!"

Carrie had done more than back up. She added a whirl and a quick dart to the left. Her fingers jerked desperately at the light switch. There was a click and blackness.

Things happened with appalling speed. The blonde screamed. Porky came racing down the stairs. Stoker recoiled from danger and fell over a chair.

Carrie used the noise to her own advantage. She had regained her fallen gun. The scream of the blonde gave her all the sense of direction she needed. Her palm shoved hard against Flip's soft stomach.

The blonde wasn't wearing any girdle under her skimpy swim suit. She gasped, "Oooof!" and went reeling backward into Porky as he rushed to her aid. The collision knocked the gun out of his hand. As the two crooks went down in a tangled heap, glass jangled across the room. The frightened Stoker had jumped out a window.

Carrie's gun roared at Porky. But she missed in the darkness.

She didn't have a chance for a second shot. Instead, Carrie gasped, "Oooof!" herself. The blonde had yanked at the edge of the rug, sitting Carrie down with a jarring impact that made her teeth ache.

By the time she staggered to the light switch, the room was empty. Flip and Porky had dived through the smashed window. Carrie didn't attempt to pursue them.

Darting through the pantry, she raced back to the kitchen. She used her pencil flashlight to guide her. Not once had she forgotten the grim fact that Aleck was still missing! She was convinced now that he had never left the kitchen by way of the pantry or the living room. There was only one possible way he could have disappeared so suddenly without sound or trace!

Carrie divined how she had escaped Aleck's fate. It was only because she had stepped from the kitchen window to a table before she had touched the floor! She had a hunch that there was a cellar hidden under the kitchen, in spite of the denial by Mark Patten!

She proved it by reaching out a careful hand and pressing hard on the floor beneath the inner sill of the window. A square section swung downward on hinges concealed in the baseboard. It was weighted so that it swung instantly up again the moment Carrie released her pressure. But the beam of her flashlight had already shown her what she expected to see.

At the bottom of a deep shaft, a man was lying in an unconscious huddle. His face was a white, familiar blur in the rays of the torch. It was Aleck!

Carrie descended with more care than her impetuous assistant had used. She tied a length of clothesline to the heavy base of the kitchen stove and slid downward to the bottom of the pit.

A ten-foot plunge to a hard con-

crete floor had knocked Aleck senseless. But to Carrie's relief, she found no bones broken. Working swiftly, she used pain to bring him out of his stupor. The things she did to his nerve centers with the tips of her pressed fingers seemed heartless, but it was the only quick way to rouse him.

CHAPTER IV.
RICE AND DAMES.

ALECK staggered finally to his feet, choking off a groan as he saw Carrie's finger laid warningly across her red lips.

They tiptoed along a narrow passage. It led horizontally through the depths of the earth beneath the cottage.

A door barred their way. It was steel, and immovable to their touch. But the lock was an ordinary key-and-bolt arrangement. Aleck was able to take care of it after a patient attack with a small steel implement that looked like a bent screwdriver with a wafer-thin edge.

They passed into a large vault.

Carrie knew it was a treasure vault before they broke open the first case. There were dozens of these bulky cases, all of them fastened with the seal of Great Britain. They were piled in tiers alongside the inner wall.

Aleck gasped as he stared at the dull, yellow gleam of the ingots inside the case they broke open. It was a precious metal that no private citizen had the right to possess under the laws of the United States.

Gold!

"The *Sea Queen* loot!" Aleck whispered, his jaw sagging with amazement. "So *this* is where it went! On an island off the coast of Maine. By the Lord no wonder the police couldn't find it!"

Carrie Cashin nodded, her eyes shining with triumph.

The gold on the *Sea Queen* had been sent over by England to stabilize the price of the pound sterling. Armored trucks carried it from the Cunard pier to the Federal Reserve Bank on Maiden Lane. But one of the trucks had been hijacked on Church Street. Machine guns from a disguised pedler's wagon knocked off the guards. Masked men drove off with the loot. How the armored car vanished so swiftly was still unexplained. It was found the next day, smashed open and empty, near a vacant field on the lonely outskirts of the Belmont Park racetrack in Long Island. The gold ingots were never recovered.

"Mark Patten directed the crime," Aleck gasped. "That's why he rented this cottage from Stoker! His painting was just a blind. He brought the loot up here by boat and dug an underground vault. He was letting it cool off before attempting to dispose of it through the underworld gold market."

Aleck's tremulous voice steadied.

"Patten must have tried to double-cross Porky and Flip. He knew they'd come after the gold. So he hired private dicks to kill off his pals on the pretense that the crooks were after museum paintings."

"Sssh!" Carrie warned.

The sound of footsteps were dimly audible from the darkness of the tunnel. Carrie and Aleck backed out of sight.

In another moment Flip appeared, followed by Porky. Their excited whispers disclosed the fact that they had located the trapdoor in the kitchen. They had slid down the rope Carrie had used for her descent.

Flip gasped as she saw the glint of the gold bars in the open case.

"I knew it! It *had* to be here! That's all I wanted to find out!"

She whirled suddenly toward Porky. There was the glint of a gun in her hand.

But Porky was not to be tricked so easily. He struck her arm up. The bullet smashed into the ceiling of the chamber.

There was a lightning-swift struggle in which the thinly clad Flip was at a terrific disadvantage. Porky's heel stamped viciously on her bare toes, causing her to cringe with pain. As she bent forward, he brought his knee upward against the girl's abdomen. It dropped her, writhing, to the floor. Porky's gun muzzle jutted toward the prone girl in the bathing suit.

Before Aleck could interfere, Carrie Cashin's warning grip restrained him. She held him motionless in the dark corner where they crouched unseen.

ANOTHER crook had reached the treasure room! His arrival interrupted Porky's murder attempt. A metallic voice grated triumphantly:

"Drop your gat. Porky. You needn't worry about Flip. I'm going to kill her—and you, too!"

The blaze of an electric torch glared in Porky's eyes, blinding him. He was forced to drop his weapon. He uttered a hoarse shout of rage.

"You double-crossing rat! I want my share of the gold. Part of it belongs to me. I helped stick up the armored truck, didn't I? I took all the risk, damn you!"

"That's because you're a sap," the man with the gun chuckled.

His face was covered with a blue bandanna handkerchief. Merciless eyes gleamed through the narrow slits cut in the makeshift mask.

"Your pay off is a steel-jacketed bullet. That's all the split a sap is entitled to."

Porky's rage changed to terror. He was facing death and he knew it. He tried to talk his way out.

"You can't get away with a kill. There's two private dicks somewhere on this island. They'll hear the shots. They'll block off your escape and nab you for murder."

"The hell they will!" the masked man growled. "They're on the other side of the island, racing through the woods to find *you and Flip*. I know exactly how to handle these dumb dicks."

His laughter made a rustling echo.

"I'll tell 'em I killed you and the blonde in self-defense. I've got a nice alibi. Aleck and his girlfriend think I'm on the level. When they come down with me to look at the gold hoard—I'll let 'em both have it in the back. Then *nobody'll* know anything. Except the fish out in the ocean, where it's nice and deep for weighted bodies."

His finger began to squeeze on his trigger. Aleck, horrified, had no chance to fire. Porky's terror-stricken body was between him and the masked killer. It was Carrie who gave Aleck his opportunity.

She had picked up one of the heavy bars of gold. She dropped it crashing to the floor. The unexpected sound pivoted the masked man off balance just as he fired.

His bullet went wild. In the same instant, Porky dived at him. It was a fatal thing to do. The masked man was as quick as a cat. His second bullet drilled Porky in mid-stride.

Aleck's left arm swept sideways like a football tackle's, knocking Carrie to her knees. He was afraid that in the wild mêlée of shooting, she might be hit by a slug. Hur-

dling Carrie's body, Aleck advanced behind the barrage of his .45.

He emptied the gun before he reached his masked foe, but Aleck didn't care about that. The fury of his attack made his enemy retreat in zigzag leaps, without a chance to return a shot. And it brought the tough-minded Aleck within grappling distance!

His final leap through the darkness brought him headlong against the killer. They fought in a squirming huddle alongside the wall of the chamber. Aleck's right hand closed on the masked man's gun. His other tightened on the killer's throat.

He forgot about the killer's electric torch. The masked man had snapped its light off, but the torch was still in his left hand, like a blunt-nosed club. He swung it against Aleck's skull, toppling him.

It gave the killer an easy chance for murder.

The next instant, a cyclone struck the masked criminal. It was a slim, human cyclone—one that managed to kick, scratch, bite and shriek at the same time. For once in her life, Carrie Cashin had gone utterly berserk, frightened enough at Aleck's peril to forget every bit of scientific fighting she knew.

She was flung off finally, in an exhausted heap. But it gave Aleck time enough to clear his head of cobwebs and go to work.

He was a lot better than Carrie at gutter fighting.

When he finished, his clothes were ripped, there was a heel-print on his cheek and an ooze of blood along his throat where a bullet had gouged a furrow. But he was still on his feet. The killer was out of action, a whimpering bundle of pain on the floor.

"That's that," Aleck panted, his good-natured face still rigid with fury. "Mark Patten has come to the end of his dirty trail."

Carrie Cashin shook her head.

"Sorry, Aleck, but I'm afraid you've figured this one wrong. My hunch is that you'll find Patten stowed away behind one of those cases of gold ingots. The skunk you've caught is—Bruce Stoker!"

HER words were true. When Aleck ripped the mask away, the face of the owner of the island was disclosed—the sleek hypocrite who had pretended he was lured there by a telegram from Patten.

"Stoker faked that telegram himself," Carrie said quietly. "He lied when he said the operator at Eastport had identified Patten. Stoker needed a convenient excuse to be here to protect his loot."

"But—" Aleck sounded confused. "What about Porky and the blonde? Wasn't Porky . . . didn't Flip—"

"We might as well call Flip by her real name. Marjorie Cullen! She's the sister of one of the slain guards on the armored truck that was held up. Her bleached hair didn't fool me. I remembered her face. Her brother was innocent of that robbery, and so is she. She was brave enough to attempt something the police had failed to do—to vindicate the memory of her brother and bring his murderer to justice. Am I correct, Marjorie?"

Marjorie Cullen had recovered from her faint. She nodded weakly. Mark Patten was there, too, rescued from where he had been hidden behind the cases of ingots. His gags and his bonds had been removed by Aleck.

"I had a good job as a secretary," Marjorie faltered. "I gave it up and called myself Flip. I deliberately entered the underworld, looking for a clue to the death of my brother.

A whispered hint I heard in a Broadway bar led me to Porky. I . . . I was nice to him . . . made Porky believe I was in love with him. After a long time he told me about the holdup."

"What happened to the armored truck? How did they manage the getaway?"

"They drove it to a nearby garage. A horse van was waiting there . . . one of those huge vehicles used to transport race horses to the various tracks. They ran the armored car up a runway inside the van. They drove the van out to the Belmont Track and dumped the armored car in a nearby field. Then they took the gold up to the island in a boat."

Marjorie Cullen shuddered.

"The rest was a nightmare of pretending to be Porky's moll . . . actually trying to find proof of the loot's whereabouts. Porky never told me who the boss was. I . . . I thought it was Patten. Otherwise, I never would have . . . have shot at him."

"A girl with a figure like yours can pull a gun on me any day in the week," Patten said huskily.

Marjorie flushed. But there was nothing in Patten's eyes to make her angry. It was the clean, admiring gaze of a painter who sees something lovely he'd like to transfer with paint to an imperishable canvas.

"Some day," Patten said gently, "when you know me better and realize that I'm neither a crook nor a heel, I hope I can persuade you to pose for me, Miss Cullen."

Carrie smiled at them both. They made a nicely matched couple, she thought. Maybe some day she'd have a chance to throw rice at two pretty swell people. But she'd have died rather than admit she was sentimental.

"We've got to get over to the mainland," she told Aleck crisply, "and summon the police. Isn't there a boat of any kind on the island?"

"There's an old leaky flatboat on a mud bank across the island," Patten said doubtfully. "You'd run an awful risk trying to row it eight miles."

"Lead me to it," Aleck grinned.

"If it upsets," Carrie objected, "you might be drowned."

"Would it make any difference?"

"It certainly would," Carrie snapped in a cold, businesslike voice. "I'd have to go to all the trouble of breaking in a new assistant."

But her smile didn't match her hard-boiled words. Marjorie Cullen, watching Carrie and Aleck, suddenly thought about rice herself!

APPEAL

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CLICK RUSH, THE GADGET MAN,
FINDS PLENTY OF ACTION IN

THE MYSTERIOUS JUGS

BY LESTER DENT

The Mysterious Jugs

CHAPTER I.
MYSTERY AND A PLANE.

CLICKELL RUSH was taking the brown hide off a baked potato when the telephone rang. "This," the voice said, "is the sheriff."

It sounded like a long-distance call, so Rush asked, "Any particular sheriff?"

"Why, the sheriff of the county where they had the plane disaster," the voice explained.

"What plane disaster was that?"

"A Federal Airways ship. Found it this morning. Don't you read your newspapers?"

"Not always."

"Your brother was killed."

"My brother?"

"Yes."

"Hm-m-m!" Rush said.

Rush did not have a brother.

Puzzled, he stared at the brown skin that had been on the baked potato—the plate on which the potato skin lay was a modernistic brown, the tablecloth was brown, walls of the apartment were dark brown, ceiling a lighter shade of brown, carpet a darker brown, and the curtains, upholstery, lamp shades, almost everything else, were shades of brown. Rush's clothing was also shades of brown. He liked brown.

Rush was not a large man, but he was wiry—that is, equipped with a set of muscles which looked as if they might be made out of wires. He was frequently mistaken for an acrobat or an aërialist—by men who were acrobats. There was not much chance of his ever winning any beauty prizes, but neither was he homely enough to cause people to turn and stare at him.

"You positive this was my brother who got killed?"

"Hold the wire a minute," the sheriff said.

Rush held the receiver to an ear and waited, and wondered who was paying for the call. A chill afternoon wind shook the brown window curtains, and brought in car-horn hooting, street-car rattling and shouts of a newsboy on a street corner somewhere concerning the snowstorm in the mountains.

"You there?"

"Yes," Rush said.

In an I-am-well-and-hope-you-are-the-same voice, the sheriff said: "To whom it may concern. In case of accident to the bearer, please notify my brother Clickell Rush, Imperial Apartments, Central Park West, New York City. This is the Clickell Rush who is famous as a detective. I hereby appoint him my sole heir."

"I'm a famous detective, eh?" Rush asked.

"Maybe, but I never heard of you," the sheriff said. "Anyway, what I just read you is what it says on the paper we found in his pocket."

"Paper in his pocket, eh?"

The sheriff said, "They must have missed it the first time they searched the bodies, at the plane. In the morgue later on, here was this paper in one of the pockets."

"I see," Rush said.

He didn't see. He had no brother, but it appeared the words the sheriff had read over the telephone referred to himself, it being true that he had gathered some repute as a detective who employed unusual gadgets to solve crimes, at the same time it also being true that the detective business was no choice of his own—he had been trying all the time to be a plain inventor, and would have been, too, except for a toad.

The business about the toad—toad named Bufa—was so fantastic that

he never told anybody about it unless he had to.

At the present time, Rush did not want to get mixed up in anything. He opened his mouth to say so.

The sheriff said, "This twenty thousand dollars cash your brother carried had us worried. Glad we found you."

RUSH closed his mouth. He did not have a brother. He did not want to be a detective. But twenty thousand dollars had an interesting ring.

"Twenty thousand dollars, eh?" Rush said. "Are there any other heirs?"

"Other heirs? You should know."

"Heirs have been known to quarrel over an estate."

"Eh?"

Rush asked, "I wonder what else I inherit?"

"Say, hell, if he's your brother, you know more about that than I do," the sheriff grumbled.

The sheriff was beginning to sound suspicious, so Rush headed his questions along a different trail.

"What made the plane crash?" he asked.

"It didn't crash."

"I thought you said—"

"I said 'plane disaster.' There can be a disaster without a crash, can't there?"

Rush said, "It would be unusual."

The distant sheriff cleared his throat and talked.

"That's what this was—unusual," he said. "The plane apparently made a forced landing on this meadow on the mountains. It got down all right. There were three passengers, the pilot and the copilot in the ship. Five, all told. They must have stayed in the plane, and run the engines to keep warm, and carbon monoxide gas from the engines killed them all. Anyhow, they were just sitting there in the plane, dead as doornails, when half a dozen farmers, out tracking a wolf, found them."

Rush contemplated the telephone and thought, and it all seemed clear enough, except for the fact that he did not have a brother, nor did he know anyone from whom he would be inheriting twenty thousand dollars.

Rush asked, "Has there been a toad around there?"

"A what?"

"A toad."

"Say, are you crazy?"

"Never mind," Rush muttered. "Sorry I brought it up."

The sheriff asked, "Are you coming out here?"

"If you are sure there are no toads mixed up in it," Rush said, "I probably will."

"Well, that's what we wanted—wait a minute." The sheriff appeared to exchange words with someone in the same office. Then he said, "They tell me they've been through the baggage that was in the plane, and found the part that belonged to your brother. We'll have that for you, too."

"Baggage? What kind of baggage?" Rush asked.

"Well, it ain't baggage, exactly. It's a lot of little jugs."

"Jugs?"

"About a hundred little jugs," the sheriff explained.

Rush said, "This sounds like something that should be looked into."

FOUR HOURS later, Rush stepped out of a hired ski-equipped plane and looked around at more snow than he had imagined existed anywhere in the United States this late in the spring. All about, the mountains were white humps furred

with evergrene trees. Closer at hand was the hangar of the local airport, a building half-buried in the drifts, and the windsock on it hanging stiff and fat with snow.

Rush jumped out of the plane, broke through the crust, and was neck deep in snow.

"Blazes!" He looked at the pilot he had hired. "You know the stuff was this deep?"

"Hell, no!"

"What would've happened if the plane skis had broken through the snow crust.

"Something unpleasant, probably," the pilot said. "But what are you worrying about? You're down safe, aren't you?"

Rush looked hopefully in the direction of the hangar, but there was no sign of life. A gust of wind went past, scooping up snowflakes like clouds of sugar and swirling them along.

After he had shivered, Rush reached into the plane and dragged out three average-sized suitcases. The pilot made no effort to help; the flier already was standing up in the plane, selecting his take-off route. Rush floundered with the suitcases toward the hangar. The plane bellowed, scooted up a great funnel of snow, went skiing across the field, moaned up into the lead-colored sky, and vanished by the time Rush reached the hangar.

A flurry of snow pushed Rush into the hangar office, and wind pounded coat skirts against his legs. The four men in the place—three sloppy-looking, one neat—stared at him without excitement or interest. The three slouchy men were attendants around the airport, judging from their garb.

The fourth man wore a sporty skiing jacket with hood, skiing trousers, and large black shoes that were made for hiking, not skiing. They were very flashy. They did not fit the appearance of the man who wore them, somehow.

The man in the skiing outfit was at least fifty, looked like a long wolf, and seemed the least interested in Rush of all.

Rush asked, "Where did they find the plane with the bodies in it?"

There was silence. Then one of the sloppy men moved his head slightly.

"Ten miles other side of town," he said.

"There a taxi around here?"

"Nope."

"Telephone?"

"Wire down."

"It's been *some* storm," one of the men volunteered, rather shortly.

Rush remembered the neck-deep snow outside, and concluded the explanation was rather unnecessary. The more he thought about the snow—it was cold, too—the less the idea of walking to town appealed to him, for the town, as nearly as he had been able to judge from the plane before it landed, was more than a mile distant. The town had not looked like much from the air.

About when Rush was getting to the point of thinking up choice swear words, the long wolf of a man got up and stretched.

"Well, hell," he said, "I guess I better be getting along back to town."

None of the slovenly men said anything. They were passing around a plug of chewing tobacco.

The long wolf went to the door.

"You walking in?" Rush asked.

The man looked at Rush. He shook his head. "Got a sleigh."

"Could a man hook a ride off you?" Rush asked.

The long wolf did not look pleased.

"Cost you two bucks," he said.

Rush did not look pleased, either.

"Under the circumstances—O. K.," he said.

The sleigh turned out to be a farm sled pulled by two iron-gray crowbait horses with long icicles on their whiskers. There was hay in the bed, quilts, a pile of ice-hard snowballs.

They got in, the long wolf of a man threw snowballs at the two crowbaits, and they got started. They drove half a mile, the horses getting off the road once, and the sled nearly turning over twice.

Then the long wolf of a man turned around unexpectedly. He had a gun in his right hand, a dark revolver.

"Heh, heh!" he said gleefully.

Rush looked at the gun end and his back skin began feeling queer.

"You weren't the least bit suspicious, were you?" the wolf of a man said.

CHAPTER II.

ABOUT JUGS.

THE wind carried a flurry of snow over them, and the icy particles struck Rush's face with distinct impacts and made the old horses duck their tails and hump their backs.

"Get your hands out from under them quilts!" the man ordered.

Rush put his hands in plain view and let them lie in the cold.

He asked, "You know what you're doing?"

"If I don't, I'm gonna be awful surprised," the other growled.

He held his gun steady, clucked at the horses, which pretended deafness until he leaned over the sled dashboard and gave one of the old nags a wallop with his revolver, after which they galloped, snow flying. The man steered them into a lane that led to a shack, said, "Whoa!" and the horses almost fell down in their haste to stop.

"Get out," the man ordered.

The shack interior was gloomy and cold, also as bare as it could be, except for evidences on the floor that sheep and cattle had been kept in it, long ago. There was a mow up above, which appeared to contain some hay.

The two shack occupants were hump-shouldered in their coonskin coats, and blue-nosed with the cold. The coats were identical, exactly alike in every detail. The two were not twins. One man was long and swarthy, almost as long as the one in the ski suit, with thick lips. The second man was slender, not as long, very, very blond, with eyes as pale as a winter sky; he was also, except for his mouth, not much more than a boy.

"This him?" the blond boy asked.

He and his companion had been jumping up and down to defeat the cold, and they kept doing that, and beating their hands together.

"This is him, all right," growled the man in the ski suit.

"Sure?"

"Hell, I've seen his pictures in the newspapers. Of course I'm sure."

Rush looked as bewildered, and as agreeable, as he could. He put a thick Irish accent in his voice.

"Sure and begorra, you lads seem to know me," he said, "but I swear the likes of you have got me puzzled. Have we met? My name is Patrick O'Malley, no less, and I'm from Ireland no more than two weeks. Patrick O'Malley, no less, come to see his Uncle Seamus—"

"Cut it out!" said the man in the ski suit.

"Sure and now—"

"You're Clickell Rush, known as the gadget detective. Right well known you are, too."

Rush was disgusted.

He said, "Since you know so much, maybe you also know about the toad."

"Toad?"

Rush nodded. "That's right—toad."

The men exchanged glances, and one said to Rush, "You serious about this talk?"

"The toad's name is Bufa," Rush explained.

The man in the ski suit struck Rush unexpectedly with his gun, struck much as he had struck the old horses to make them go. Rush fell down.

"What we're interested in," the man said, "is little jugs."

RUSH sat on the floor, and it felt cold through his brown topcoat, brown trousers and brown underwear shorts. In his head, besides pain from the blow, there was a singing sound such as telephone wires make in the cold. It finally went away.

"Jugs?" he muttered.

The coonskin-coated men drew guns, and all three of them gathered around him with a confidence that he did not like.

One said, "We might as well understand each other. It was a hell of a tough break for us when those farmers out wolf hunting happened to find the plane before we could get to it. So now the cops have the jugs. We want the jugs. You can get them, because of this brother stuff that was in the note they found in Crownblock's pocket."

"Who's Crownblock?" Rush asked.

"Your brother." The man laughed harshly. "Don't you know your brother?"

Rush eyed them.

"Does that brother stuff puzzle you, too?" he asked.

"It did," the other admitted. "Particularly because we don't think Crownblock had any note in his pocket when he died in that plane. But that's not the thing. The thing is the jugs. You get them for us, see."

Rush said, "Tell me one thing. How did you know I was coming?"

"Hell, don't you know we've got sense enough to tap the sheriff's telephone line, first thing? We had to know whether they suspected the truth of what happened to those people in the plane, didn't we?"

"You're telling this guy some things," one of the other men told the man in the ski suit.

"No more than he suspects."

Rush suggested, "Tell me some more."

"You go to the devil!"

The man in the ski suit kicked Rush, upset him on the floor, and while Rush was flat, suddenly stamped down hard with one of his hiking shoes. The shoe sole had long, sharp calks, and these ripped Rush's clothing and dug into his flesh.

"Ever see a man who had been stomped with calked shoes?" the fellow demanded.

Rush groaned loudly, doubled up in agony, hands pawing his chest—fingers taking off three coat buttons in quick succession, and secretly. He let the buttons fall on the floor, then heaved to his feet, grabbed the man who had kicked him, and they began to struggle. The other two men rushed in to help.

When Rush maneuvered one of them into stepping on a button, the button instantly exploded with green-blue flame and ear-splitting violence. The victim shrieked, leaped high to favor the one foot—from which most of the shoe had been blown.

It was pure luck that a second man got on another button almost at the same instant. Green-blue flash again, and a dynamite-cap crack of a sound. The man flung his arms up in shocked agony, and let go his gun. The weapon skidded into a corner.

Rush dived for the gun, got it, turned and began shooting. He aimed at the chest of the man in the ski suit, pulled trigger. He swung the gunsights to the head of one coonskin-coat wearer, yanked trigger again. The gun reports deafened him; the weapon jumped furiously in his hand. He carefully selected the part of the third man's coonskin coat that should be over his heart, and shot once more.

All three men ran out of the shack door—unharmed.

Rush scrambled over, kicked the door shut.

A young woman in the haymow, who had rolled over until she could look down through a roughly square opening, made a remark.

"As a marksman," she said, "you're simply great!"

RUSH looked at the gun—it was a revolver, huge—and began to tremble in spite of himself. He broke the breech of the gun, examined the unfired cartridges, then hastily stuffed them back into the weapon.

"They're not blanks," he said.

"No," the girl said, "and the gun is a nationally used target type. I know. It happens to be mine."

Rush said, "How do you account for me missing them?"

The young woman stared at him, then said, "Might I suggest that you try it again? Maybe your luck will change."

Rush peered through cracks cautiously, and discerned the sled and three occupants. The man in the ski suit was throwing snowballs at the old horses, and they were galloping and knocking up prodigious quantities of snow.

After taking a rest through a crack, and the most careful of aims, Rush fired again. Unless he was mistaken, the bullet dug up snow not more than twenty feet from the shack, and disgustingly far to the right.

"Well, I'm consistent, anyway," he said.

The young woman had been squirming around, and now she got too close to the edge of the opening in the ceiling, and fell through. Rush leaped, caught her, although both of them ended in a rather tangled pile on the floor.

She was a rather nice armful of girl, brown-eyed, dressed in a sport outfit and red galoshes. Her gloves and her muffler were also red.

Rush untied the red muffler from her wrists. From around her ankles, he took a man's belt.

He said, "Wouldn't have to be tied up long this weather to freeze."

"Don't I know it!" the girl said.

She got to her feet and had herself what seemed to be a really satisfactory shiver, complete with teeth-rattling.

"They have you prisoner long?" Rush asked.

"What time is it now?"

Rush consulted his watch. "Four thirty."

"Well, they got me at three o'clock. Almost as soon as I stepped off the train from New York."

"After I saw the depth of the snow my plane landed in," Rush said, "I began to wish I had taken a train, too."

"Wouldn't have made much difference."

"No?"

"They have a man watching the depot, too."

"Swell. What about the jugs?"

The girl looked in several directions in a way that was evasive. She said, "I think we'd better be chasing those three men."

"But about the jugs—"

"While we're following the men," the girl said. "There'll be plenty of time to talk."

THEY went outside and began plowing through the snow. It had been cold in the shack, but it was colder out in the snow, which was seldom less than waist-deep.

The sled trail was easy enough to follow. They kept in the sled tracks, for the easier walking. There was no sign of the sled—the going was a succession of brush-covered hills.

The sled was going toward town.

Rush said, "Now, about the jugs that—"

"Did they have any of your baggage in their sled?" the girl asked.

"Yes. Three bags."

The girl said something explosive and desperate, and began running, as best she could, along the snowy trail.

Rush overtook her, and they plowed along, one of them following each sled runner mark.

"What about the toad?" Rush yelled.

The girl looked at him blankly.

Rush nodded and explained, "A toad named Bufa."

She shook her head. "Now you're talking about something that *does* puzzle me."

She hurried on. Obviously, she had never heard of a toad named Bufa, and the thing was fantastic enough to bewilder her.

The toad named Bufa, Rush reflected sourly, was fantastic enough to bewilder almost anybody. It had bewildered Rush himself for—let's see, now—over a year, wasn't it?

Over a year ago, Rush had come to New York City with several trunks full of scientific inventions for catching criminals. He thought the inventions were rather good. The police considered them too fantastic to be of any value. It had gotten into the newspapers, and a reporter had dubbed Rush the Gadget Man.

One day, he found the toad, Bufa, in his hotel room. The toad was about the size of a small bulldog, made of papier-mâché and composition, and contained a wired-radio "transceiver," an ingenius device that worked something like a radio transmitter and receiver, except that the power wires of a city's electrical distribution system were necessary to carry the communication energy. You plugged the toad into a light socket, and it immediately became possible to carry on a conversation with another "transceiver" plugged in somewhere else in the city. It was, Rush had discovered, impossible to locate that other "transceiver."

And so Bufa had come into Rush's life. The toad was fantastic, but the voice of the toad was even more wacky. The voice of the toad—Rush didn't know who it was.

Bufa was somebody with money, somebody cracked enough to want to see unusual crimes solved, and who was willing to pay ten thousand dollars for each solution. Ten thousand had looked good to Rush. He had immediately turned detective—and had spent the several succeeding months endeavoring *not* to be a detective any more.

Bufa had a distressing habit of involving Rush in a crime whenever he refused to solve one.

About this present mystery of the jugs, and the plane with all the passengers dead, Rush was suspicious. It seemed like a typical crime such as Bufa would select for him to solve. But Bufa, the toad, had not appeared in the thing, as yet.

"Look!" the girl said.

Rush looked.

"A house," the girl gasped.

The house was made of brick, had a tiled roof, was extremely neat, and smoke climbed from the chimney.

"I'll see if they have a way of getting us into town in a hurry," the girl explained.

The inhabitant of the house was a roguish young man who was all smiles when he saw the girl.

"Best I can do for you," he said, "is furnish one pair of skis."

They set out with the skis.

"You wear them," Rush said, referring to the skis.

The skis made easier going for the girl. They covered a quarter of a mile.

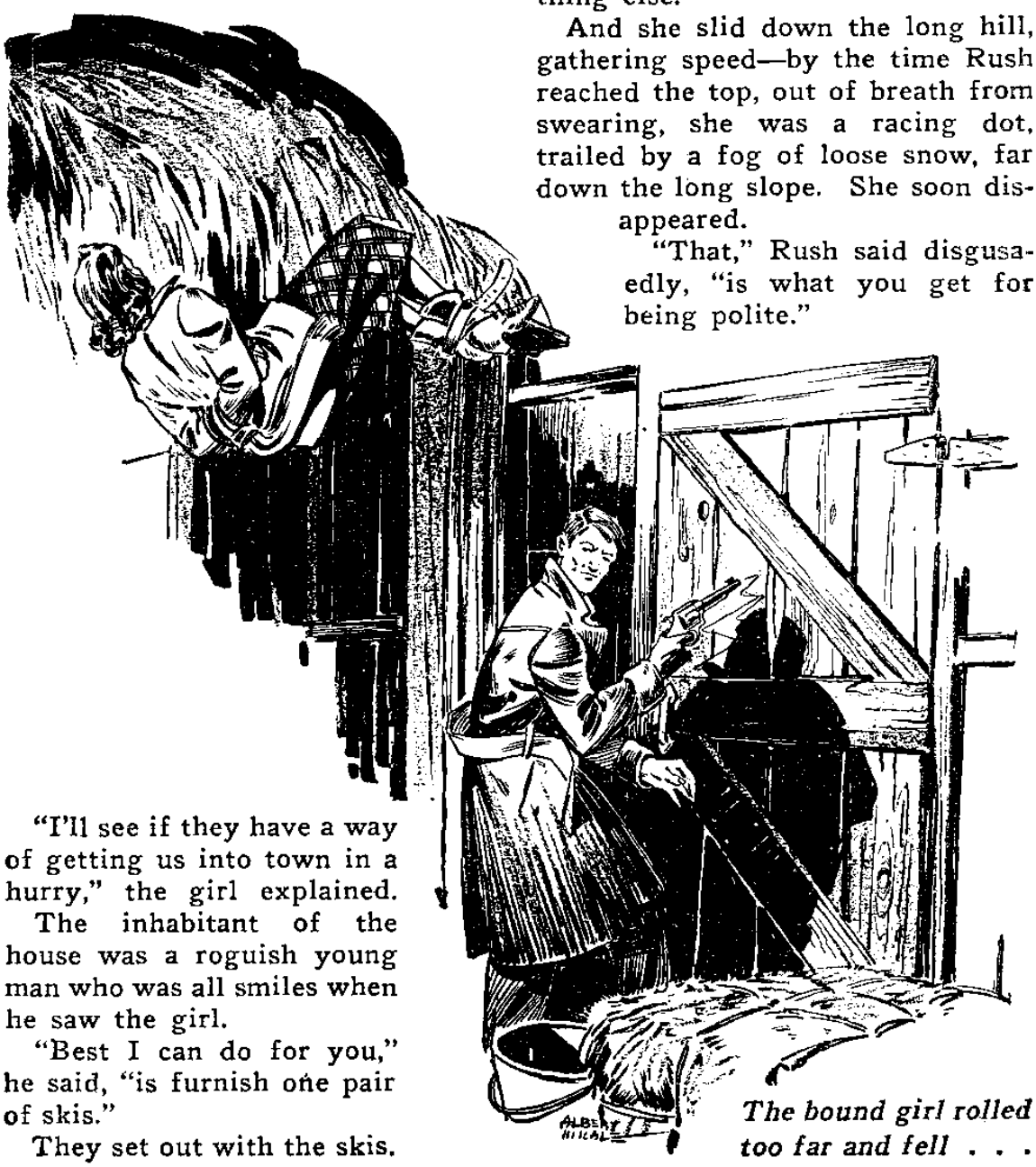
"About the jugs," Rush said. "It's time you told me—"

The girl drew ahead rapidly until she reached the top of a hill. Then she turned.

"The thing for you to do," she called, "is go on back to New York and forget all about jugs and everything else."

And she slid down the long hill, gathering speed—by the time Rush reached the top, out of breath from swearing, she was a racing dot, trailed by a fog of loose snow, far down the long slope. She soon disappeared.

"That," Rush said disgusaedly, "is what you get for being polite."



The bound girl rolled too far and fell . . .

CHAPTER III.

THE EARLY BIRDS.

THE town was too small for a morgue, so the bodies had been put in the local undertaker's establishment in the back room. In spite of the cold, quite a crowd of morbid individuals had gathered and were marching through, peering at the bodies of the plane victims. The pilot and copilot still wore their uniforms.

Rush's "brother"—Crownblock—did not look like Rush in any respect. He was at least fifty years old, a very fat man, one who looked as if he had always liked good living, and had done a lot of it outdoors, judging from his healthy tan. The man's clothes were expensive.

Rush had never seen him before.

The sheriff's office was in the back of the city hall, which was four doors down the street from the funeral home.

The sheriff was a man with a face that seemed composed of jaw and eyebrows. One jowl was full of tobacco. He wore thick German socks inside six-buckle overshoes, had a huge woolly muffler around his neck, wore a muskrat cap with ear flaps, and a sheepskin coat, the outside pockets of which were stuffed with Florida travel literature.

The sheriff took a cigar which Rush offered. They grinned at each other sociably.

"I'm Clickell Rush," Rush explained. "The fellow you called on long-distance telephone."

The sheriff took three bites off the cigar, chewed for a moment, then shoved the quid over in the edge of his cheek,

"Hm-m-m!" he said. "That's interestin'."

"Here," Rush said, "is some more that is interesting. Did you know that the people in that plane were murdered?"

"The idea was beginnin' to occur to us," the sheriff admitted.

"I figured it happened this way," Rush explained. "There were six people in the plane—not five. Only five were found dead, I know. But there were six. The sixth person forced the plane down, took a rubber hose or something, and piped exhaust from the plane motors into the cabin and killed everybody. You found anything to substantiate that suspicion?"

"Rubber hose," the sheriff said.

"The one the killer used to get exhaust gas into the plane cabin?"

"Reckon so. It was hid nearby."

Rush nodded, much pleased. It always elated him to make a wildly random guess and have it turn out correct.

He said, "The sixth plane passenger—the murderer—went to get in touch with his associates. He needed their help."

"What did he need help for?"

"The jugs were heavy, weren't they?"

The sheriff nodded. "Yep. Reckon the box of jugs weighed over a hundred pounds."

"So the killer went to get help in carrying the jugs away," Rush surmised. "And the plane was found, much to his hard luck, before he got back."

"And so—"

"And so the killer is now trying to get hold of the jugs—"

"My idea exactly," the sheriff said.

He shoved his hand into one of his coat pockets, among the Florida travel folders, and brought out a cheap nickel-plated pistol that was extremely large.

"My idea exactly," he repeated.

"Huh—what?" Rush swallowed. "Say, what—"

"The real Clickell Rush has already been here," the sheriff said.

"Been here!"

"Got the jugs, and gone," the sheriff added.

ASTONISHMENT raised Rush up out of his chair, and the loud click that the sheriff's shiny gun made when it cocked caused him to sit down again.

"Say, look here!" he exploded. "Those guys—"

"You look here!" The sheriff shook his gun meaningly. "You're out of luck, because the real Clickell Rush told us you would be showing up here, trying to impersonate him and get the jugs."

Rush swallowed. "What about the twenty thousand dollars?"

"Oh, the *real* Clickell Rush got that, too."

"Made the haul complete, eh?"

The sheriff raised his voice and shouted for deputies, and two men with shotguns came in.

"We've got the murderer, boys," the sheriff said.

"Meaning me?" Rush asked.

"Yep."

"How you figure that?"

"Oh, the real Clickell Rush told us that the fellow who would show up pretending to be him would undoubtedly be the murderer."

"Did the real Clickell Rush wear a ski suit?"

"Yep."

The jail into which they threw Rush was made of concrete blocks, had a concrete slab of a roof, and it gave every promise of being very cold. The door had been standing open, and snow had drifted in. They handed Rush a shovel and watched him shovel out the drifted snow. Then they locked him in.

The bunk was a box seven feet long, three feet wide, two feet deep, full of straw. Rush sat down on the bunk disgustedly.

It was very clear that the man who had seized him at the airport had hurried on ahead and managed to convince the sheriff and get the jugs and the twenty thousand.

It was not as clear to Rush how he was going to get out of the trap they had set for him.

Nothing else was very clear about the mystery, either.

Disgusted, Rush threw himself back on the box of straw that was the bunk. Something hard dug into his shoulder. It was under the straw. He got the object out.

The thing was a toad, made of composition, about the size of a small bulldog. It had a greenish back, undersides the color of Missouri River mud, and warts.

Rush put the toad down carefully, then said three words as loudly as he could.

"I thought so!" he yelled.

THE light for the jail cell was an electric bulb that dangled from the ceiling by a cord. Standing on tiptoe, Rush could reach the bulb. He turned it on.

He held the toad up so that the lighted bulb rested inside the mouth of the thing, and waited. After a few moments, there was a clicking sound as the light warmed a thermostat concealed inside the toad's mouth, and this turned on the wired-radio "transceiver" that composed the toad's innards, and there was a humming while the tubes of the set warmed up.

"Hello," the toad said.

Rush's voice was grim. "So you got me into this after all."

The toad said, "I am Bufa, of the species Bufonidæ, feeding upon slugs and snails—of the human variety."

That was the speech with which Bufa, the toad, almost always opened a conversation.

"That statement," Rush growled, "sounds as silly as it ever did."

The toad ignored the remark.

"When the first newspaper editions to-day printed the story of the plane being found with all aboard dead," Bufa said, "it intrigued me. I sensed an unusual crime. So I came here in a hurry, put that note in the pocket of one of the victims—the note saying you were his brother, and should be notified. Then I sat back to watch."

Rush was so surprised that he couldn't think of anything to say. Not that he hadn't suspected that was about what had happened. What astonished him was that Bufa, the toad, rarely explained how he got track of a fantastic crime.

"Of course," Bufa continued, "it was unfortunate that your mysterious enemies got the jump on you. And particularly unfortunate that you are now in jail. I thought you would be there, so I went to the trouble of hiding the toad in the jail bunk for you to find."

Rush asked, "What's in the jugs?"

"You should be more interested in what is under the other end of your bunk. Or have you found it?"

"Found what?"

"The key to the jail. You might look."

"The key?" Rush exploded.

"Good-by," Bufa said.

Rush yelled, "Hello, hello!" then expressed himself in profanity until he ran out of breath. The other "transceiver" had been switched off.

Somewhere in the little town, the mysterious eccentric who was the voice of Bufa the toad—and Rush never had learned enough to be sure whether Bufa was man or woman—had ended the conversation.

RUSH put the toad in the middle of the floor, upon a little pile of straw, which made it rather conspicuous. Then he got loose snow and carefully sprinkled it in the shape of letters on the floor. He spelled out:

SHERIFF: I GOT MAD AT YOU, AND LOOK WHAT I TURNED INTO.

Bufa the toad, made an incongruous, ridiculous and undeniably interesting object, sitting on the little dais of straw.

"Give them something to wonder about," Rush grumbled.

He unlocked the jail door with the key—it was the spare key to the jail, stolen from the sheriff's desk, if Rush was any judge of Bufa's tactics—and stepped outside. He relocked the door. Then, just on the chance that he would be confined in the place again, he tossed the key expertly through the barred opening—there was no glass—so that it fell in the straw of the bunk, out of sight.

Rush walked quickly to the railway station, and sure enough, it had a telephone booth.

"Any trains left here in the last two or three hours?" Rush asked.

"Nope. None due until midnight."

Rush went into the telephone booth, and began calling in quest of an airplane. He wanted to hire a plane, he explained, for an immediate trip.

There were no planes available. The only plane in the vicinity was the one in which the occupants had been found dead.

"How about the roads?" Rush asked.

"Blocked by snow," he was told. "Not a chance of getting anywhere until tomorrow, at the earliest."

"Is there a livery stable in town?"

"Hell, the livery stable went broke twenty years ago."

"Then where can I hire a horse?"

"Well, I don't know. The druggist has two old nags and a sled, but I think I heard a pair of fellows in coonskin coats had them rented. Only other horse I know about is the sheriff's saddle mare."

"Where does he keep the mare?"

"Why, in a shed back of the jail."

Rush breathed thanks for the encyclopedic natures of village telephone operators, and went back to the jail. The shed was easily found, and the sheriff's mare, a big black with the legs of a racer, easily led outside. Rush mounted. The horse promptly threw him. Rush got on again. And off. The third time, he convinced the horse he could stick.

He galloped out of town.

The telephone operator had told him exactly where the death plane could be found. He rode in that direction.

THE plane stood on a lake that was entirely frozen over, and swept comparatively bare of snow. Rush left the sheriff's horse—the animal threw him again, just as he started to get off—in a thicket of evergreen trees.

The plane was one of the big all-metal transport craft, low-winged, two-motored, as shiny as a new dollar, and as streamlined as something out of a futuristic dream.

There were State police around the craft, and snowshoes stuck in the snow nearby. All but two of the police were standing about; the two were examining the plane.

Rush began circling, using stealth, watching for tracks. It was getting late in the day, so that there was enough gloom in the woods to make tracing-finding difficult.

He saw the girl before he found her trail. She was moving stealthily, and she had a weapon, a double-barreled shotgun. From the trigger guard of the gun, a price tag dangled, so evidently she had purchased the weapon in town.

The girl crept along for fifty yards or so. Furtively. Rush prepared to quicken his pace and catch up with her.

One of the men in coonskin coats came lunging from behind a tree and fell upon the girl. Her shotgun did not explode. He got a glove over her mouth before she could cry out.

They struggled on more or less even terms, until the other coonskin-coat wearer, and the long wolf of a man in the ski suit, and a fourth man wearing a gray-and-blue mackinaw, came charging out of the underbrush and helped with the girl.

By the time the fight between the girl and the four men had ended with the girl overpowered, Rush had crawled close enough to catch their voices.

"This makes it swell," one of the men said savagely. "Besides this girl, nobody else knows what it is all about. We get rid of her, and we're clear."

"What about this other bird—Click Rush?"

"What does he know?"

"About the jugs."

"He doesn't know what is in them. And he probably wouldn't know what the stuff was, even if he'd seen it, which he didn't."

The other made a grumbling noise which did not convey anything except that he was not entirely satisfied with the situation.

The man in the ski suit snorted. "Hell, it's perfect," he declared. "Crownblock takes off by plane with the samples, and I'm aboard. He doesn't know me by sight. I look

up the route of the plane, and telephone you fellows to be at this little town. When we get over the town, I spring a gun and force the pilot to bring the ship down."

"I suppose everything went perfect from there on," muttered the other.

"Maybe it didn't. But it came out, didn't it? Maybe Crownblock did spout off until everybody in the plane knew who I was and what was up. But I fixed that. I was all prepared, in case I had to do that. I had the rubber hose in my handbag, ready for the job. Only I couldn't carry the jugs afterward, through that snow, and while I was gone after you fellows, them blasted farmers found the ship. Anyway, we've got the jugs now, haven't we?"

One of the men had moved a few yards and scrambled up a tree. He peered intently.

Now this scout returned.

"All the cops are going but two," he explained. "They're putting their snowshoes on."

That was obviously what the men had been waiting for. They became grimly silent; ten minutes passed.

"Waited long enough," a man muttered. "It'll be getting dark. I've got to have light to lift that plane off. And we've *got* to have the plane. It's the only way of getting out of this hole."

"What about the girl?"

"Hell, she's Aimee Gordon, and she works for the same company as Crownblock. Has charge of the New York office. She dashed out here when she heard the plane was down. And she surmised we'd be trying to grab this plane to make a break—"

"What I meant," the man said, "is what do we do with her?"

The man in the ski suit took a deep breath.

"I'll stick with her," he said. "The rest of you walk toward those cops. They won't suspect anything. When you get close, blast the cops. I'll shoot the girl. We'll take off."

It was so simple that none of them had any questions or objections.

They had gagged the girl. Now they made sure that the gag was forced in her mouth very tightly, then examined their mufflers which they had tied around her wrists and ankles.

"You better sit on her," one suggested.

The man in the ski suit sat on her.

The others walked away in the direction of the plane.

Rush took the wrist watch off his wrist—it was a watch that looked large, even if it was streamlined—and opened the thing. The mechanism of the watch was very small, actually occupied but a fractional part of the case. He put the works in his pocket. Then he flipped a lever in the watchcase—it instantly began to buzz—and threw it.

The watchcase landed in the snow where Rush intended—about a yard from the man in the ski suit. The man heard it strike. He stared at the spot curiously. He was about to lean over when the case exploded.

The blast was terrific, knocked the man completely over. Snow jumped up in a great cloud.

Rush made his voice as loud as he could, in the direction of the plane.

"Watch out for those men, cops!" he yelled at the top of his voice. "They're killers! They're going to shoot you!"

IT was hard to run in the snow, but Rush did the best he could. Snow hurled up by the trick grenade

Continued on page 125

WAVE A FLAG

BUT THE FLAG WAS RED, AND IT WAS GOING TO THROW A NATION INTO DISASTER!

BY STEVE FISHER

A NEW BIG RED BRENNAN NOVELETTE

Wave A Flag

CHAPTER I.

THE MAD SENATOR.

FROM: UNITED STATES NAVAL INTELLIGENCE
TO: LIEUTENANT HAROLD BRENNAN
SUBJECT:
MEMORANDUM CLARIFYING MOTIVES FOR RECENT ASSIGNMENT AS PERSONAL BODYGUARD TO SENATOR GEORGE WATKINS.

LISTEN, BIG RED, WE WANT NO MORE TELEGRAMS LIKE THAT LAST ONE WE RECEIVED FROM YOU. YOU HAVE YOUR ORDERS TO REPORT TO SENATOR WATKINS AFTER HIS COAST-TO-COAST BROADCAST TONIGHT, AND TO GUARD HIM AGAINST CERTAIN PERSONS AND ORGANIZATIONS WHICH WOULD GENERALLY PROFIT BY SILENCING HIM THROUGH DEATH. YOU ASKED US IN YOUR WIRE IF YOU HAD BEEN DEMOTED TO AN ORDINARY GUN FLUNKY. AFTER YOUR MATCHLESS RECORD IN THE NAVAL INTELLIGENCE SERVICE BREAKING DOWN SPY CASES, SOLVING MURDERS; CONSIDERING YOUR MAGNIFICENT PAST PERFORMANCES, YOU SHOULD BE AWARE OF HOW VALUABLE A MAN YOU ARE TO US. THEREFORE, IT IS BECAUSE WE FEEL WE NEED A MAN OF UNORDINARY COURAGE AND SKILL TO PROTECT SENATOR WATKINS THAT WE HAVE CHOSEN YOU. THE SENATOR IS IN GRAVE DANGER OF BEING KILLED, AND BECAUSE HIS RADIO SPEECH FIGHTS FOR PEACE IN AMERICA, MAY BE THE ONE THING THAT WILL KEEP US OUT OF WAR. IN THIS PRESENT SITUATION OR SITUATIONS THAT DEVELOP IN THE FUTURE, HE MUST NOT BE STOPPED. THE NEW SENATOR'S STIRRING APPEALS FOR PEACE IN THE UNITED STATES MUST BE CONTINUED, TO WARD OFF THE RISING TIDE OF WAR TALK AND WAR PROPAGANDA. AMERICA MUST REMAIN IMMUNE. YOUR REPUTATION AS THE WELL-KNOWN BIG RED BRENNAN OF THE UNITED STATES NAVAL INTELLIGENCE DEPENDS ON THE KIND OF PROTECTION YOU RENDER SENATOR WATKINS.

CHIEF OF BUREAU.

"BIG RED" climbed into his roadster with a smile on his face that was only half humor—he didn't quite believe the flattery the department poured on when they wished to hurry you into a case. Yet he could see in the assignment an importance which he had not at first considered. He shifted the gears of the machine and it moved into the street. He was on his way to the radio station where, in just a few minutes, Senator Watkins would be making a new "Peace-for-America" speech.

Brennan was massive. His hair was short-clipped, and his cheekbones jutted, like his jaw. He wore now only ordinary civilian clothes. On his head there was a snap-brim felt hat.

As the car moved, he snapped on the radio and tuned in the station where shortly the senator would be speaking. The soft tones of a musical program drifted through the driving compartment. Red Brennan stuck a cigarette in his mouth and lit it with one hand. He turned into Broadway and drove down the center of the valley of white lights, carefully avoiding taxis and trolleys and people.

The emotion which came to him seemed to be born of a suddenness now, yet there were elements, material and fragmentary, which had combined and brought force to the thing he felt. It was the sight of New York at night; a melody of

songs that went back twenty years—"A Pretty girl;" "A Long, Long Trail"—humming from the radio; and it was a ribbon of white light in Times Square, proclaiming European war news.

These things brought to Red Brennan a consciousness that went beyond the physical prospective of his new assignment. He realized with a swiftening pulse how much good the peace speeches of Senator Watkins were doing a country of a hundred and twenty million people.

He knew with a dread that went beyond talk and rumor and threats, the shadow of hell which, even at this moment, lay across the face of the United States. His mind traveled backward and linked the horror of twenty years ago with the present, and he knew we were fighting the same thing we had tried to fight then.

The band music swung into a make-believe march, and for a moment Brennan lived an hour he had lived once before. He saw thousands of khaki-clad men moving down Broadway which was thronged now with people; he heard the shrieking whistles of army transports pulling away from docks, taking the youth of a nation to a country where the destiny for part of them was to be a white cross lost in a maze of white crosses somewhere in Flanders.

There was in his mind's eye Gold Star flags hanging in windows; and he felt the awful echo of song and laughter that had burst from the throats of men who had now turned from clay to fertile mud. He knew that the only real mark left of gallant men in the soggy, moss-covered mounds and crevices that had once been the zigzag trenches of the Argonne Forest, were millions of slimy moles a hideous blood-red in color.

Brennan shuddered, for he knew now that the noisy glory of bands, the screaming din of propaganda, all the flashing color and patriotism that sweeps a land where the fever of war is in the air, had gnawed even on the edge of his desires as a fighting man.

He saw clearly now, and knew that too soon the fever of glory would turn to a stink of death. He saw shrapnel and searchlights, and thousands of wings in the sky; he heard the heavy drone of a cavalcade of army trucks, and the rapid spitting of machine guns. He was aware of a determination stronger than any he had ever experienced, that he must do his share to keep our country out of any and all wars.

With the realization came for Brennan the heavy feeling of responsibility. He must protect Senator Watkins at all odds. The young politician had for the last few weeks been preaching peace to listening millions. His speeches had shattered the growing wall of propaganda.

Through the suggestion of Watkins, peace clubs had been organized. Foreign agents intent upon getting America into a war, had failed at every turn to fight down the feeling of immunity Watkins had placed in the heart of millions of citizens.

Brennan realized that without Watkins' violent crusade, the country might by now have placed itself in a position where, under certain circumstances, war would be inevitable. It was Watkins who almost singlehandedly was now saving the United States from a suicide into which it had plunged twenty years before.

Brennan turned the car at Fiftieth.

He paused for a signal light to change, then started again. The music on the radio ceased. There was an announcement. Then Senator Watkins was being introduced. Suddenly he began to speak:

"My friends, for six weeks I have talked to you about peace. But, and I should be the last to say this were not the situation imperative, there are certain conditions under which peace is impossible. There are such things as national honor and pride which we as Americans must recognize. You have all been reading your papers. You must see now, as I do, that peace is no longer possible. You know, by this time, that I am your friend. That I would not advocate war if there were any sane way to escape it. Unfortunately, there is not. We must declare a national emergency. We must clarify our stand in Europe. We must make it plain that we are ready for war. My friends, I am changing my stand. We must have war! We must have it at once! War, I say, for all to hear. We must fight. We must—"

Big Red Brennan stared incredulously at the loud-speaker. Incredulously, he listened to the ringing voice of Senator Watkins. Watkins—America's white hope for peace. He listened, stunned and breathless, to the strongest war talk he had ever heard. Watkins had changed his colors. He was fighting against the good of the government which had put him in office. He was disputing every good word he had ever uttered about peace. He was shattering his own bulwark of American protection.

"—Wire to your congressman, tonight! Insist that America make clear her stand. Insist that we take up arms at once! Let us be the aggressors, not softies who stand back and let our foreign neighbors lose that which is rightfully theirs. Let us send our fighting forces across the seas—"

There was a momentary pause, then the speaker continued in a somewhat faster, sharper pace:

"Attention, my friends. I have an important announcement to make at this time. From now on, starting to-morrow night, you will hear my broadcast from a short-wave station. Tune in at approximately 4.2 megacycles. Remember, about 4.2 megacycles. Explanations for this change will be made on my next broadcast—"

"The senator," Brennan whispered thickly, "has gone mad!"

He throttled down on the car and speeded toward the radio station.

CHAPTER II.

RECEPTION WITH LEAD.

IN the next instant, as Brennan's car zigzagged through traffic, the radio went dead. There was a period of four seconds, then an announcer's voice.

"Ladies and gentlemen, due to circumstances beyond our control, we will be unable to bring you any more of Senator Watkins' speech."

They had cut Watkins off!

Brennan thanked the gods for quick-thinking radio technicians, and the strict air censor which had brought about the discontinuation of the talk by the peace senator who had suddenly turned war mad.

In the next minute Brennan was swinging his car to the curb in front of the station. He cut the motor, drew on the brake and hopped out. There was a small crowd gathered at the door. A large chauffeur-driven sedan stood in the street with the motor running. Big Red glanced at his watch and decided to wait for Watkins here. By this time, he should be on his way out.

Presently the door opened; two

men swept a path through the crowd, and the stately-looking young senator followed in their wake toward the curb.

Red broke through, grabbed Watkins' shoulder. The senator was a tallish, blond man; his eyes were blue and penetrating. He turned toward Brennan, jerking the hand away from his shoulder.

Brennan had been ready to speak when everything seemed to happen at once. The two burly men who had cleared the path now turned back. They grabbed Big Red and, between them, rode him backward through the people. They surged backward with him like football linemen taking out a player.

Big Red shrugged angrily from their grasp.

"Listen, I'm—"

"You're nuts as far as we're concerned," said one of the men. "We're Watkins' bodyguards; we're hired to see that crackpots like you don't—"

Big Red saw the lithe senator dashing toward the waiting sedan. He broke and ran for him. One of the large men beside him reached out and slugged him across the back of the neck—a rabbit punch which almost sent Red sprawling.

He whirled around, his eyes glazed with hatred. He stared at the two "bodyguards." Each of them held a gun now.

"Listen—"

"Move on, wise guy!"

BRENNAN sensed that he must get to the senator. That was his assignment and duty. Yet he faced these guns. Still stunned from the blow on the back of his neck, confused and desperate, he jerked angrily to get his gun.

His hand had no sooner moved than the weapon of one of the strong-arm men cracked out. Two shots screamed across the short space between the gunman and Brennan.

Big Red was hurled backward with the impact. He skidded, and sagged in the street. His legs gave out, so that he was sitting in a crazy, twisted position, blood trickling from his hip and down across his face where the second shot had grazed his temple.

Brennan sat there with the cry of war raging in his eardrums like a distant echo. He saw the blurred figures of people in front of him; he felt the swish of the tires of the sedan, as the big car bore Senator Watkins away; and, too, Big Red was aware of cold steel pressed against his fingers. Numbly, he lifted out his gun. His lips thinned; his eyes were half closed. He jerked his body so that it was prone. He lifted one arm. He fired.

One of the gunmen dropped his arm as though it had been a thing he carried, and not part of him. The arm hung limp and useless; a gun dropped from the open hand. The other bodyguard turned and disappeared back through the increasing crowd of people. But the man whose arm had been hit rushed forward in violent rage. He lifted his foot and kicked it into Brennan's face.

For a moment, Big Red was a tangle of legs. There was stinging agony in the region of his nose and jaw. He felt blood on his cheeks. Then he was holding those legs; the man hovering over him was falling. Big Red's fist lashed out and smashed across the face as it neared. The gunman's body thudded down. He and Brennan grappled there in the street.

How long it would have gone on, no one knew. A police whistle blew at that moment. A young patrolman rushed in and dragged Brennan off his opponent. The gunman was assisted to his feet by civilians. He began to move away.

Brennan said: "Listen, I've got to get that guy—"

"Sure," said the patrolman. "Sure you do, mister. You're drunk, ain't you? Well, you just calm down and you'll be all right—"

"I'm in the Intelligence!" Brennan shouted.

"Of course you are," the patrolman humored. "Maybe you're related to Napoleon. Well, that's what whiskey will do to guys. I always said—"

The patrolman and several others were holding Brennan.

"But listen! That other guy's getting away—"

"It's all right. He was trying to protect the senator. Everybody saw how you tried to get to Senator Watkins, and that other gentleman was just holding you back. You'll be all right after you have some coffee."

BY the time Brennan was able to identify himself to the shame of the assuming patrolman, Senator Watkins and his two strong-arm men were gone. There was absolutely no trace of them.

The senator had not gone to his home in New York; nor was there any word that he had left for Washington. The hotel at which he sometimes stayed reported that he had not checked in there. It took Big Red two hours to check on all of these places.

Brennan's chase around Manhattan in search of Watkins was both fruitless and heartbreaking. Then, at midnight, one newspaper tabloid came out with an extra:

WATKINS DEFENDS NEW STAND

Has Right to Change Mind, He Avers; Infuriated at Being Cut Off National Broadcast; Will Broadcast Tomorrow From Privately Owned Short-wave Station.

The details of the story explained that Senator Watkins would make a coast-to-coast radio talk tomorrow from a secret and hidden high-powered radio station which could be picked up by any radio set that had short wave. The paper mentioned that almost every modern radio had this facility. It said:

> Risking government indignation and what is certain to be senatorial dismissal, Watkins stated that he intends to act upon the assumption that America is still a free country, in which a citizen has a right to his opinion.
>
> "Free speech is one of the foundations upon which our Constitution was drafted," Senator Watkins said. "If the new truth I intend to preach to all who will listen offends government officials, I am prepared to resign my political post. There is no sacrifice too great to make for the right to tell the people of the United States the facts it is imperative for them to know. I am first, last and always a countryman!"
>
> The senator added that it would be practically impossible for radio officials to discover the location of the station from which he intends to broadcast.

Watkins had not only gone from the extreme of peace-at-any-price to war-no-matter-the-cost, but he had taken it upon himself to defy the very government which had put him in office.

If Watkins' future speeches for war were as stirring as those he had made in the cause of peace, it was certain that he would be able

to do much toward plunging America into the suicide of battle.

"Plain madman," Brennan muttered. "I'm assigned as bodyguard to a man like that, and I can't even find him!"

He called the tabloid which had printed the story.

"Why, he phoned it in," said the night editor.

"You mean you had no verification?"

"Just what he told us on the phone."

"But how do you know it was Watkins?" Brennan snapped. "How do you know some crank didn't telephone that story in to you?"

"We took that chance," was the reply.

"That's the trouble with tabloids," Brennan roared. "Did you try and trace the phone call?"

"No."

Brennan was silent for a moment, then: "Did the senator, or whoever it was on the phone, say why he hadn't returned to his home tonight?"

"No. He made no comment on that."

Big Red slammed up the receiver.

What he had right in his lap, he realized, was what is technically known as "a case"—not just an assignment, but a job. The whole setup of a peace senator turning savage, and then to all purposes willfully vanishing from the face of the earth, smelled to Brennan with an odor so suspicious it was stifling.

Obviously, what he had to do was to line up all the circumstances, make a complete picture of the entire evening in his mind, and then shoot holes in it: find the weak spots and turn them into clues. He would have to return to his hotel to get this work done.

A few minutes later, he was in the lobby of the hostelry; he took an elevator to his floor, swung down the corridor. He unlocked his door, snapped on the lights, and stepped into his suite. He kicked the door shut behind him and reached for a cigarette. That was when he saw her.

He saw her in just one brief instant. She was standing across the room with a gun in her hand. Her skin was pale, and her hair was very black. She wore a tight-fitting black dress against which her breasts impatiently pressed. Her lips glistened very red, and she was half smiling, half choking. Big Red saw her like this for just that instant.

In the next second her gun had spoken, and Big Red Brennan crumpled on the carpet.

CHAPTER III.

NERVOUS GIRL.

THE girl screamed. She dropped the gun, staring at the prone figure of Brennan on the floor. Then she ran across the room and knelt beside him.

"I'm sorry! I . . . I didn't mean to—"

What she failed to see was the little hole the bullet slug had made in the door. She had missed her human target by more than a foot. Brennan had dropped to avoid a second and third shot. Now he grasped her wrist, rose quickly under the power of his legs. The girl gasped and tried to jerk away from him.

She said, "I . . . why . . . I—"

"How many guns have you handled before in your life?" asked Brennan.

"None. This was the first I ever held, and I . . . I was so nervous. I was waiting for you, but when you came in I was shocked. My nerves

made my hand jump and . . . well—"

"You might have killed me," Big Red replied quietly.

He released her hand, stepped across the room and picked up the weapon she had dropped. He put it in his pocket. "Well?"

She groped nervously to a chair and dropped into it. For a moment she covered her eyes with her hand.

"I guess it was crazy," she said, "all of it crazy. I've been so desperate. I had a theory. You see . . . my name is Ethel Watkins. I—"

"Senator Watkins' daughter?"

"Yes, that is right," she said bleakly. "When he made that insane speech tonight, then failed to come home . . . when he didn't even get in touch with us . . . well, I knew something was wrong. I called up Washington, D. C. All I could get from them was an assurance that everything would be all right, and that you were on the case. They gave me your address here and said I should communicate with you. Up to there, it was all right; then I began thinking."

"You began thinking?" Brennan said evenly, but his voice traced along the edge of a sarcastic note.

"They had told me you were father's bodyguard," she continued. "Well, he had no other real enemies. That is, it occurred to me you were involved in a plot of some kind to force my father to stop making peace speeches and to—"

She paused; then, seeing the light in his eyes, went on: "Oh, I know you're a government man. But there is such a thing as cops who have their own personal rackets and . . . I was so upset. It seemed to me if I could find you, I could also find my father. So I came here. I bribed a bellboy to let me in, so I could wait for you. Then when I heard you in the hall, I put the gun in my hand. I was going to be very tough and cold . . . very calm, and all that. That's the way I should have been. But actually seeing . . . actually facing my own ideas—"

"—You blew up and fired the gun."

SHE glanced at him. "Exactly. And I don't know yet that all I've said isn't true. I don't know but what you've got father somewhere, trying to frighten him into making those awful war broadcasts."

"Do you think someone could *frighten* him into that?" Brennan asked quickly.

She nodded. "There's one thing about father . . . I don't like to say it—"

"What is it?"

"I—" She shook her head.

"I want to help you," Brennan said, "you've got to tell me everything."

She looked up. "Oh, it's only that he's such an awful coward. He has been all his life. That's why he asked Washington for a bodyguard. He had some queer notion that people who were against peace would try and silence him."

"He was right."

"I know," she agreed. "But don't you see what I mean? If they threatened his life, or if they tortured him, they could make him do almost anything—"

"I see," Brennan said. "Now I've got a theory. Did you hear your father speak tonight?"

"Yes. His voice sounded shaky and unnatural."

"In the past he has always broadcast from the station in Washington, isn't that right?"

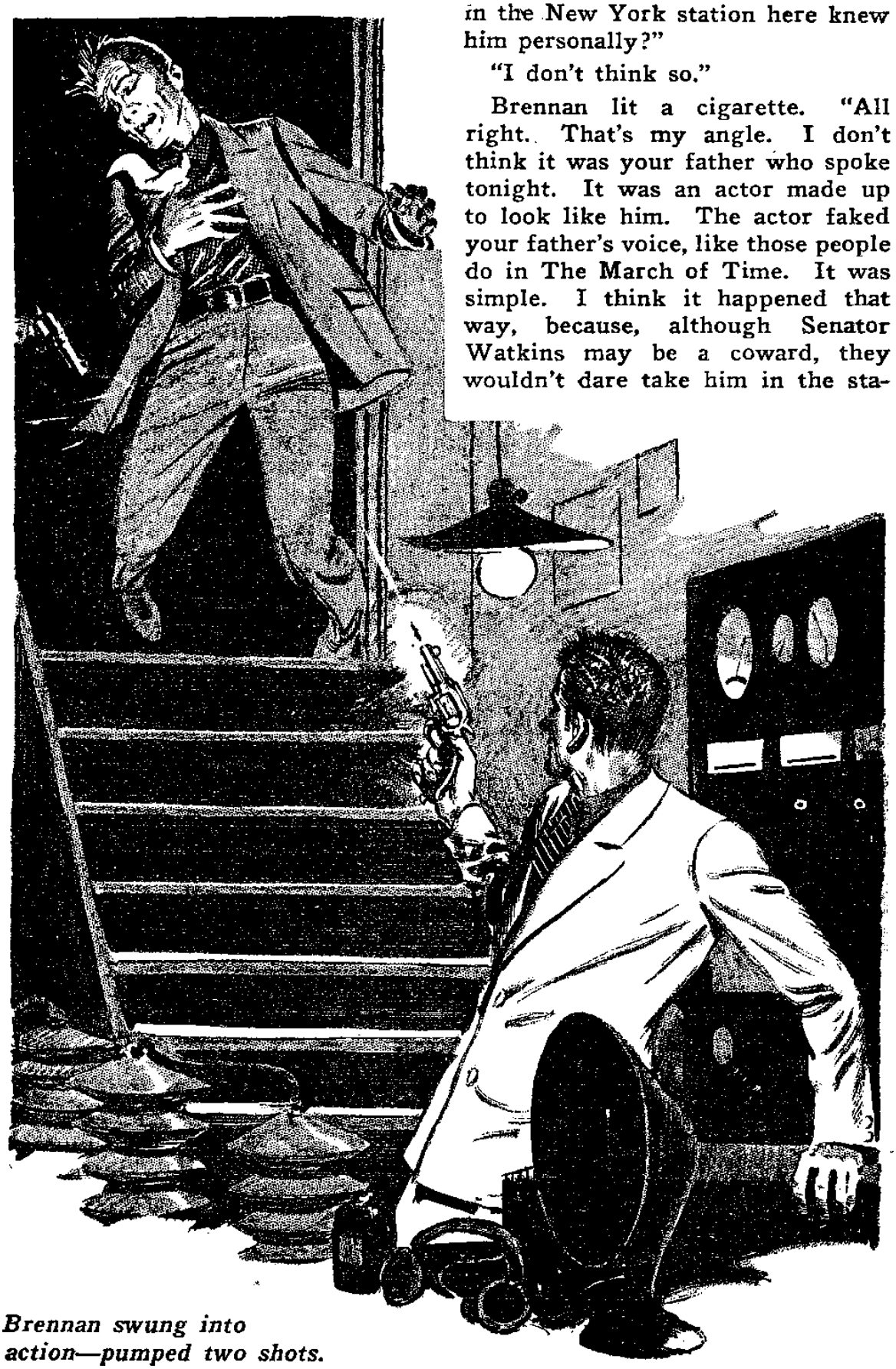
"Yes."

"Is it likely then, that anyone

in the New York station here knew him personally?"

"I don't think so."

Brennan lit a cigarette. "All right. That's my angle. I don't think it was your father who spoke tonight. It was an actor made up to look like him. The actor faked your father's voice, like those people do in The March of Time. It was simple. I think it happened that way, because, although Senator Watkins may be a coward, they wouldn't dare take him in the sta-



Brennan swung into action—pumped two shots.

tion. It would be too easy for him to make a break. They had the actor do it, so there could be witnesses who saw him talking about war. Now when they start this secret short-wave broadcasting, no one will doubt but what that it's your father. All they have to do is to keep the senator out of sight."

"They?"

"Our enemies—America's enemies. I can't call them by name because we don't know them. But it's whoever is preaching war; whoever wants to drag America through another hell."

"But how can you find them?" Ethel asked.

"That's my job," Brennan stated. "First, I'll have to get a motive. After that, a lead. And I think I'd better get to it right now. You go on home. I'll do what I can. I'll do my utmost to bring your father back alive. And to"—he paused, —"save the United States from falling over the brink these enemies of ours are doing their best to push us into."

BIG RED BRENNAN'S assured manner, his calm voice, and his cold analysis of the situation convinced Ethel Watkins that she had been mistaken when she thought he had something to do with her father's disappearance. She rose now.

Her eyes were steady. "I guess you think I'm pretty simple. Pretty useless. I suppose you'd be just as glad if I did run on home. But while you were speaking, I got an idea. Backed up, I hope, with a little intelligence. I've got that idea, and I've got courage. You must let me help you."

"How?"

"Well, you said you had to look for motive behind this. You find that. Find the right motive. Then use it as a club to smoke these people out of their hiding place."

"In what manner?"

The girl smiled. "You publish in the papers that Senator Watkins' daughter denies her father made those speeches. Print an inkling of their motive to convince them that I know all about what they are doing. We'll say that unless my father explains himself in twenty-four hours I shall expose the entire setup. If you know enough about what they are doing to frighten them, they'll think that I know enough to queer the whole deal."

"But then they'd kidnap you to keep you quiet!"

"Exactly," Ethel Watkins said. "They kidnap me, and you follow. They'll take me to wherever my father is. Wherever they are hiding out, and have this secret short-wave set."

"But—"

"You find out their motive," she said. "I'll do the rest."

"But I can't let you—"

"You *must!* It's the only way we can get to them. And we've got to save father. That's all in the world that matters. If that fake actor makes another war speech, I hate to think what'd happen. Don't you see, we've got to work getting them that way? I may risk my life being kidnaped, but what's my life compared to all the millions of lives—" She stopped.

"I see what you mean," Brennan whispered. There was both awe and admiration in his eyes as he gazed at her.

CHAPTER IV.

KIDNAPING ON SCHEDULE.

IT was no simple task to find a genuine motive for the circumstances that surrounded Senator

Watkins' strange fate. Big Red worked on it all night.

He was in touch with Washington, D. C.; in touch with the coast; and twice he telephoned Honolulu. Once he put a call all the way through to the Asiatic base in Shanghai.

But when morning broke its dull gray across the Manhattan skyline, there were papers on the street carrying the following story:

DAUGHTER OF SENATOR WATKINS DENIES FATHER MADE WAR SPEECH

Ethel Watkins Infers Voice Was Faked Last Night; Threatens Full Exposure of Fraud Inside 24 Hours

New York: Ethel Watkins, pretty black-haired daughter of the senator who is now famous throughout the country for his speeches on peace, declared that the voice of her father which last night broadcast an urge for war, was faked.

Miss Watkins stated that she was not at liberty to divulge the full details of the fraud. The voice heard last night, she said, was so well imitated that even she had at first been fooled by it. It was not until the senator failed to return to his home that she became suspicious. Digging into his files, she has come across evidence which reveals that agents of international characters are behind what is perhaps the biggest political fakery in the history of the United States.

"Because of the international complication involved," Miss Watkins stated, "I find it necessary to give the senator 24 hours in which to return and vindicate what was supposed to be his absurd stand for war. If he is not back in that time, I shall be forced to expose all that I know."

Gives Inkling of Motive

When asked to reveal a little of what might be expected in the event the senator does not return, she said that the men who had kidnaped him were foreign agents whose instructions were to involve America in a European war at any cost. With the entire fleet in the Atlantic, and the American army across the water, the entire Pacific coast would lay defenseless against what might be an Asiatic attack.

Before a fleet or army could be rushed to the coast, she continued, California, Oregon and Washington would or could be in enemy hands, with the once powerful U. S. military base, Hawaii, as the enemies' offensive fort. The full details mentioning the names of nations and men involved, she concluded, will be told to-morrow if her father has not himself returned to tell the facts.

Ethel Watkins made it fairly easy. She remained in her house awaiting the kidnapers.

BIG RED BRENNAN occupied an apartment directly across the street. With him there were three other government agents; there were four agents surrounding the Watkins house, and two in the rear. Big Red knew that the international gang with whom they would have to deal, were of no small proportions, and he had made every preparation both for Ethel's safety in the kidnaping, and to follow the gang with a sufficient number of men to overcome them when they arrived at their headquarters.

Another possibility had occurred to Brennan. The gang might have already learned, by calling Washington and disguising their voices, that he was on the case. As a precaution, they might call him at his hotel just to check up and see if he was there. If he was out, the gang might well believe that the Watkins house was a trap.

Therefore, Big Red had made arrangements at the hotel to have any call that came in immediately switched to him here, without the person on the other end of the line knowing. That is, a caller would

get Brennan at once, and would naturally believe that he was upstairs in his room.

Brennan paced the room now. He glanced through the Venetian blind, across the street at the Watkins house. There was no activity whatsoever. The shades were three-quarters drawn. Big Red dropped a cigarette and stepped on it. The other agents sat about watching; waiting, as Red was waiting.

Time dragged; an hour went by, then two. It was almost eleven o'clock when the telephone rang.

Brennan grabbed the phone. It was a call that had been switched from the hotel.

"Hello?"

"Hello. This you, Brennan?" The voice was familiar.

"That's right."

"This is Senator Watkins. I'm in town. In N. Y. I escaped those men. I must see you at once!"

"I—"

"I know what you are doing," Watkins went on. "Keep a guard around my house, because they might try to kidnap Ethel and get back at me that way. She'll be safe so long as you leave your men there to protect her. Meanwhile, I want you to meet me. Come alone."

"Where are you?"

"In a small pier office near the Battery. Just a second and I'll give you the address."

Brennan took down the address, said: "But how did you know I wasn't in the hotel?"

"I didn't. But it took longer than usual for the operator to get you, so I guessed you were having your calls transferred. Anyway, I knew if you weren't guarding Ethel personally, that your men were. Now you get right down here to see me. It's extremely urgent. I have a lot to tell you."

"I'm on my way," Brennan said.

He hung up. "You fellows carry out the plan exactly the way we intended. They may still try and take the girl. The senator may be in town—it may be him to whom I just spoke. Or it may be a ruse to get me off the scene so they can snatch the girl. Anyway, I'm going to check up. Meanwhile—follow anyone who takes Ethel Watkins away!"

"Right," one of the agents said.

Brennan departed.

BIG RED parked his car and walked down to the pier the voice on the telephone had indicated. The door was shabby, and the windows were soaped. Big Red paused; he sucked in his breath, then he opened the door and entered.

Across the room he saw the tall, blond-haired man he had seen last night. Brennan had not seen Senator Watkins enough times to know whether this was he or someone who was impersonating him.

He had very little time to reflect about it. The moment the door closed behind him, two men stepped out from another room; a third man had been behind the door. Brennan went for his gun—but he was too late.

The three had planned the trap with precision. They were on him, all at once. Brennan slammed out his fist; kicked. Then he felt a blackjack blow across the back of his head.

His knees buckled and his eyelids grew heavy; he gasped for his breath, kept trying to fight off the men, but there was one each on each of his arms now, and a third moved forward to slug him on the forehead.

Brennan lifted his knee, caught the man in the stomach and sent him hurling backward. But the respite

was momentary. The "senator" entered into the fray, and now the four men were battering at Brennan. Twice the blackjack slammed across his head. His eyeballs swam. He had the sudden feeling as though he were drifting through blackness—a blackness in which on every side of him there was screaming pain.

WHEN Brennan regained consciousness there were lumps on his head, and no bandages. He was riding in a big black sedan. On one side of him was the phony actor-senator; on the other was a very tough gentleman, indeed. He bore the brunt of a black eye Red had given him, and he did not look entirely happy about it. There were two besides the driver in the front seat. The scenery outside looked like that along the Henry Hudson parkway near the New York City line.

"He's awake," said the man with the black eye.

"Just for a time," said the actor, who still retained the dignity of his senator's make-up. "Just for a time," he continued, "because after awhile he'll die."

"That'll be a shame," replied the man with the black eye. He didn't sound as though he meant this.

Brennan said, "What about the girl? What about Ethel Watkins?"

The actor laughed nastily. "Why, she's still in her house with all those guards around her, I guess. You didn't actually think we would be stupid enough to try and kidnap her? I mean, even if we had succeeded, it would be admission that what she had printed was true. It'd only point us out, reveal our hand. That'd be sappy. We didn't want her."

"But those files—"

"Don't give us no baloney," snapped the man with the black eye. "We happen to know that Senator Watkins had no files. All that girl knew was what you told her. But nobody in the papers read about you. Nobody—at least the public—will miss you. If we grabbed the girl, there'd been a big squawk. This way, it's nice and quiet. You see? With you gone the girl won't know a word to say."

Brennan was silent.

"Yeah," the actor continued. "And tonight I'll broadcast from short wave, as Senator Watkins. I'll deny everything Ethel had printed in the papers. We'll be right back in the position we were before. The only thing is, we had to get you out of the way. After that fracas outside the radio station last night, we checked up on you. Found out who you were. When we read the papers this morning, we decided you were getting too close to finding out why we were doing all this. So we knew we'd have to get you, make you tell us the rest of what you know, then bump you off. You see, we don't like to have smart government dicks like you getting too close to our actual operations."

"Then the theory was correct. You're paid to stir up feeling, so that possibly America will enter a European war; and while we're in a European war, another nation will attack the Pacific coast?"

"Something like that," grumbled the man with the black eye. "And it won't matter to you any more, where you're going." He chuckled. "It's kind of funny. All those Feds waiting around the Watkins house. And Ethel Watkins waiting for somebody to try and snatch her. It's funny, because the kidnaping came off exactly according to schedule—

only it's *you* we wanted to kidnap instead of the girl."

"It's so funny," said Brennan, "that I'm breaking my ribs laughing."

CHAPTER V.

FROM COAST TO COAST.

IT was not that the gang's headquarters was cleverly, or even carefully hidden; it was the commonplace about it which made it good. It was just above Stamford, and it looked just exactly like any other Connecticut farmhouse. There were even cows and horses to add a scenic touch.

It there was a short-wave radio-sending station hidden beneath the ordinary brown shingling of the house itself, its aërial was certainly nowhere in sight. It was possibly located miles from the actual sending set, and connected with special wires.

Whoever had conceived the plan for this hide-out had done it in the most up-to-date streamlined manner. Cops usually disregarded innocent-looking farmhouses. Cops didn't figure crooks would go to the bother to keep livestock and poultry just to cover up their actual purpose.

Big Red was properly impressed. He knew how venally clever these men were; he knew they were capable of murdering him without the bat of an eyelash.

Four of them escorted him to an especially constructed room on the *third floor of the house.* It was really the attic. There was only one window and it was barred. A man was strapped to a chair. He looked like the actor who had impersonated Senator Watkins.

The difference was that this man *was* Senator Watkins. He was here, a prisoner. He was gagged. His eyes flickered at the sight of Brennan. He watched the others coldly as they strapped Brennan to a chair opposite him.

When it was all over, when Brennan was tied up, the man with the black eye spoke.

"The thing is," he said, "in two hours we've got to make this broadcast we promised the papers. We'll deny everything you told that Ethel Watkins to print. And you don't need to worry about whether we'll convince them it's really the senator talking. We'll do that all right. Meanwhile, we'll leave you here to look at the real senator. After the broadcast, we'll come up with irons and one thing and another, and see if you won't do a little talking."

He chuckled, then he ran his finger around the rim of his black eye and his face sobered.

"Yeah," the actor added grimly, "we enjoy breaking down punks like you, Brennan."

They departed. Big Red heard a double bolt shoot across the outside of the door.

BRENNAN sat there for a moment staring at the senator.

"You aren't, by any chance, the man who was to be my bodyguard?" asked the senator. His voice was only slightly muffled.

Big Red stared. He couldn't speak because of the fresh gag in his mouth.

A trace of a smile touched Senator *Watkins' lips. "Funny thing, me* talking. I guess you thought I couldn't. They thought so, too. The thing is, I've been like this for hours. I chewed off the part of the gag that was acually in my mouth and swallowed it. I guess it'll digest all right."

Brennan half smiled.

"Well, my bodyguard has caught up to me," the senator continued, "and here we are. My bodyguard and myself." There was humor in his voice.

Brennan's silence was still enforced.

"As a bodyguard, exactly what are you going to do for me?" the senator went on.

Brennan suddenly relaxed his muscles. He shrugged ropes and straps from his hsoulders. With simplicity, he got loose an arm. He removed the gag from his mouth and continued removing his bonds.

"Maybe I'm going to do plenty for you," he said. "I've been thinking some—and I have the right plan. It's all cold turkey now."

The senator stared with his eyes wide. "How in the devil do you do *that?*"

"A trick we learn in the Intelligence," Brennan said, rising. "In this game, it's all tricks. You have some, and the other guy has some. You arrange a kidnaping, and they're smart and countercross you on it. So then they do something, and you play a countermove right back at them. When you work for the government, you fight a lot, shoot some, and try and keep your head. That rope gag is easy. You keep your muscles very taut while they're being applied. After the guys go, you relax. You'd be surprised at the difference. Two or three inches slack sometimes."

He moved to the senator, tore what remained of the gag from across his mouth, and loosened his ropes.

"But how are we going to work this?" Watkins asked. He was trembling. "The place is full of those men. They're armed. We've nothing to fight them; and escape is beyond the question."

"Your daughter told me you'd be a little bit like this," Big Red answered quietly. "But you just listen to me, sir, and do as I say. They left a car out there near the road. There's a slight hill. The wood's not too good in this house, and it'll be easy to get the bars from the window. I'll get you to the ground. Then you climb in the car, release the break and let it roll. No noise, see? By the time you're at the bottom of the hill, you can start the motor and they won't hear it."

Watkins was breahless with excitement at the proposal, and stifl scared. "But—" he started to say.

"When you get to Stamford, you go to the network station. I'm going to tell you what you must say to them there—"

"But what of you?"

Big Red Brennan snapped: "Don't worry about me, senator. I've been dealing with rats like those men for a long time. You just listen to my instructions, because there's a lot of them—"

TWO hours later there was a triple network broadcast from coast to coast. One announcer handled the talking for all three radio chains. He said:

"Ladies and gentlemen, you are about to listen to the most amazing broadcast in the history of radio. We regret to announce that the speech alleged to have been made by Senator Watkins last night, was a fraud. Senator Watkins is a man of peace, and he was impersonated by an actor whose motive was to attempt to bring America into a war.

The genuine Senator Watkins is here in our Stamford studio and will shortly speak to you. Senator Watkins will speak to you for one minute. Then, through the aid of our technicians, the combined networks

will switch to a short-wave radio station operated from the headquarters of a group of internationalists. They are unaware that Senator Watkins has escaped from them, and the same actor who spoke to you last night will attempt once again to impersonate the senator. You will listen to him for two minutes, and then we will switch back again here to Stamford and the real senator will talk to you. In this way, you of the radio audience may compare the genuine voice with the false one. You will listen in on one of the biggest exposures in history.

"We now give you Senator Watkins, in person. In one minute, we will switch to the internationalists, who are still unaware of what we are doing—"

Big Red had taken advantage of the fact that there can be no receiving set in a broadcasting room. A loud-speaker would naturally conflict with the broadcasting. Therefore, the men upstairs grouped around, ready for the actor's fake speech, could not hear this combined network's radio talk.

Brennan, who had escaped from the attic and was now in the cellar, heard all of it. Two technicians who were to have handled the short-wave broadcasting, lay unconscious near his feet. Brennan had slugged them. They were breathing, but there was no movement from them beyond this. Big Red had already arranged the short-wave controls, so that the broadcast from upstairs would go through. There was a loud-speaker down here, so that the technician could hear at all times how the broadcast was going.

Big Red had taken a gun from one of the men he had knocked out. He held it in his lap now, and waited. He had instructed Senator Watkins to send special agents down from Stamford. They hadn't yet arrived, and they wouldn't until the broadcast was well under way. It was too good a thing to miss. Big Red's "counter play" this time was the master's stroke.

Brennan listened to Watkins' voice. Then he heard the networks announcer again. Suddenly, the switch was made which tuned in the broadcast from upstairs. It was not as smooth as the chain broadcast, but it was clear enough to understand. The actor, impersonating Watkins, had already started on a war speech combined with denials to the stories printed in the morning papers. The two separate broadcasts, coming through in rotation on the same program, made the actor sound ridiculous. He roared:

"I am, above all, a countryman. I believe in truth. And, my friends, the time has come that war is truth! We must wave the flag of justice and right. We must take arms—"

Big Red was so amused at the thing he had done that he did not hear the man with the black eye as he came down to check up on the program's reception. The first thing he knew, there was a shot.

It missed, and Brennan swung from his chair into action. He stood, his legs spread, his gun hand held hip high. He pumped two shots at the burly figure. The man with the black eye went down. He was dead before he hit the floor.

BUT they must have heard the shots from upstairs. Brennan dashed to the cellar steps. He crouched behind them, waiting. Several men came running down the stairs, guns drawn. When Big Red had counted seven, he plunged out the lights, leaped up the stairs. He slammed and bolted the door. There were no windows. This was the only escape.

He heard the howls from behind him.

Gun in hand, Big Red moved inexorably into the broadcast room. Only the actor and two assistants, one of them an "announcer," remained. The announcer drew and fired.

The man went down with Big Red's first shot.

The second man crouched behind an amplifier and began shooting. The bullets rocketed across the room. Big Red paid no attention to them. He rushed forward. The actor stopped broadcasting and rose. He was fumbling with a gun.

The man who was crouching got Brennan. Big Red's hip stung. He was whirled with the bullet's impact, and he hit the floor. But almost at once he was in a sitting position, still firing. The man who had nicked his hip took a bullet between the eyes. The actor, terrified that he alone was left, dropped his gun and threw up his hands.

He screamed surrender a dozen times.

"Don't shoot me! Don't shoot me! For the love of mercy, don't shoot me!"

Big Red Brennan got slowly to his feet. He limped across to the actor.

"You might turn off the radio," he said hoarsely. "The whole nation heard you scream like that—the whole of America that heard you preach war last night, knows now what *you* do when you've got a gun in front of you. Everybody from coast to coast knows."

Brennan turned off the short-wave set.

FROM: UNITED STATES NAVAL INTELLIGENCE
TO: LIEUTENANT HAROLD BRENNAN
SUBJECT:
DISCONTINUATION OF DUTY.

LISTEN, RED, THE SENATOR DOESN'T NEED A BODYGUARD ANY MORE, NO MATTER WHAT YOU SAY. WE ORDERED YOU BACK AND THAT STICKS. THAT DOUBLE BROADCAST STUNT WAS THE BEST THING YOU'VE EVER DONE AND WE AGREE THAT WE SHOULD ALLOW YOU CONCESSIONS, SUCH AS PERMITTING YOU TO HANG AROUND THE WATKINS' HOME. BUT THE FACT IS WE NEED YOU HERE. ANYWAY, ETHEL WATKINS WILL PROBABLY BE HERE IN WASHINGTON SHORTLY AFTER YOU REPORT BACK FOR DUTY. SO YOU SEE YOU HAVEN'T ANYTHING TO WORRY ABOUT. YOU'LL BE AROUND HER ANYWAY.

CHIEF OF BUREAU.

HERE'S THE BIG DIME BUY IN RAZOR BLADES!
One thin dime buys plenty of shaving comfort now! Thin Gillette Blades, precision-made for your Gillette Razor, give bang-up shaves at a bargain price. Ask for Thin Gillettes.
4 FOR 10c
8 FOR 19c
10¢
Genuine THIN GILLETTE BLADES

BRITISH AMBASSADOR TO VIENNA VANISHES IN PLAIN SIGHT
Nov. 25, 1809

COLORED LIGHTS SEEN OVER ISLE OF MAN
Feb., 1938

MYSTERIOUS COLLIERY EXPLOSION CAUSED BY STRANGE LIGHT
July 14, 1938

ZEPPELIN HINDENBURG WRECKED BY WEIRD COLORED LIGHTS
July, 1937

KING GEORGE V REPORTS SEEING STRANGE COLORED LIGHTS
June 11, 1881

5 436-TON VESSEL, WITH CREW OF 38, VANISHES IN CALM SEA
May 16, 1938

Newspapers, today and yesterday, report the disappearance or wrecking of trains, boats, airplanes and the vanishing of people, all associated with the phenomena of strangely colored lights—seen by some but not by all!

Are these facts associated with the action of people who at the last moment decide, through some strange intuition, not to board a train or ship that is later wrecked?

Founded on facts, Eric Frank Russell has written "Sinister Barrier" the most astonishing story since H. G. Wells' "War of the Worlds"!

Start this story today. It will fire your imagination. You will live with the characters through the most unusual experience of your life. It is destined to take its place with "War of the Worlds" by H. G. Wells, "Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea" by Jules Verne, "The Lost World" by Conan Doyle and "Outward Bound" by Sutton Vane.

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Herald-Tribune

DOGS FRIGHTENED BY MYSTERIOUS NOTHING
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HERD OF CATTLE MADDENED BY MYSTERIOUS FEAR
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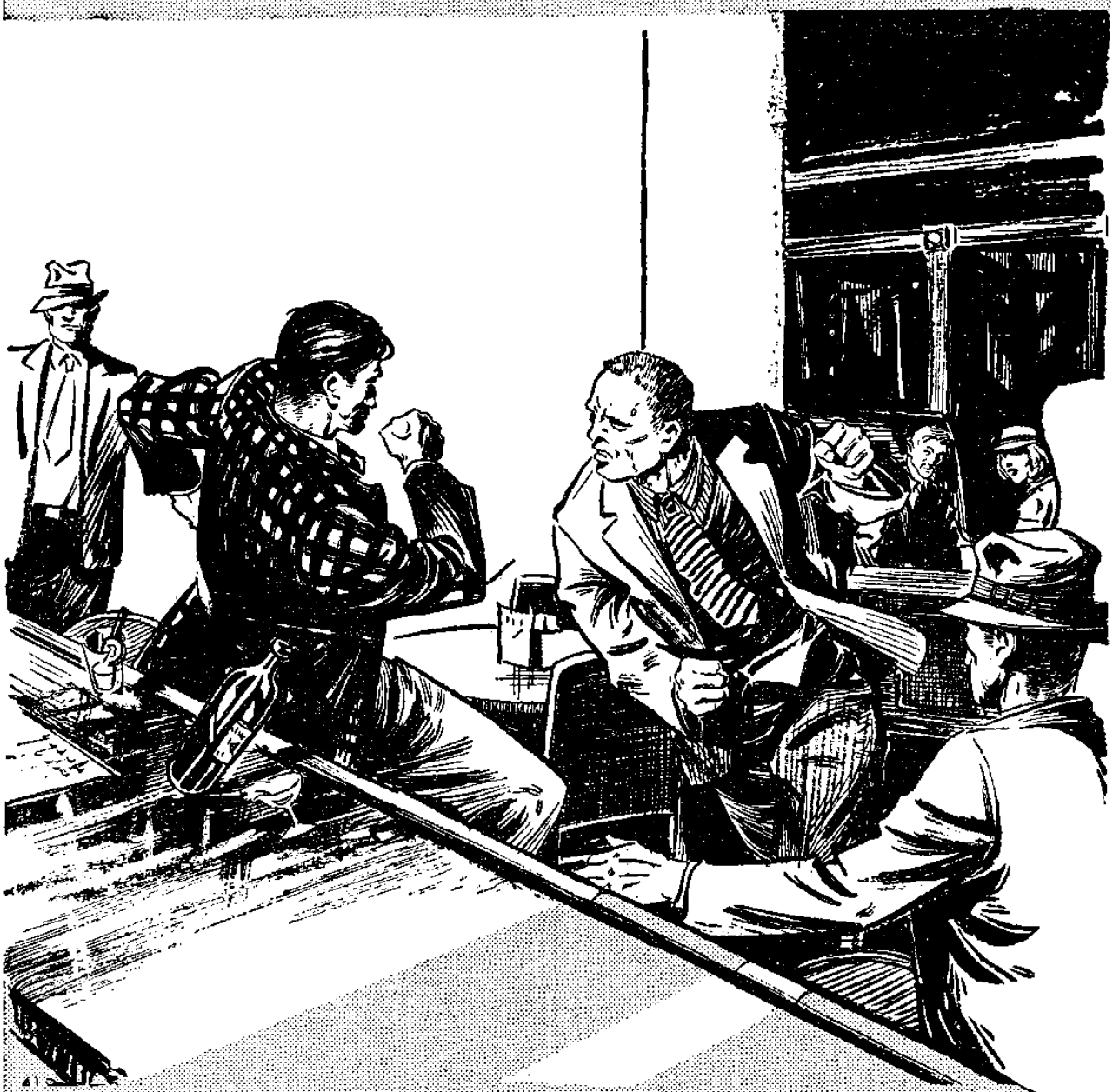
SUICIDE FOR KILLERS



BY W. T. BALLARD

RED DRAKE, RACETRACK UNDERCOVER DICK, MAKES A FIVE-GRAND DEAL WITH DEATH!

Suicide For Killers

CHAPTER I.

SHAKEDOWN.

THE man was offering me five thousand dollars, and all I had to do was lie to a girl. I sat there in the hotel room staring into his narrow, weaselike features.

His name was Tiny Bliss, and he was contact man for Ed Kroul. Kroul was a big-shot gambler—the biggest bookmaker in town. Everybody knew him; everybody knew the girl, too.

Her name was Nora Grayson, and her dad was the mayor. Her dad was a smart politician, but Nora was on the level and she had money of her own. She owned a race horse.

The horse's name was Splendor and, unless the sports writers were all cockeyed, he was slated to win the Governor's Handicap on Saturday. That's why Kroul was interested in the girl, why he wanted me to lie to her. He didn't want Splendor to win.

He'd taken a lot of bets on the horse. It was rumored that he was holding over two hundred thousand dollars at eight to five and two to one. If the horse won, it would break Kroul; so he had to make the horse lose. He tried to bribe the jockey, but the boy was honest—he wouldn't listen.

Kroul didn't waste time. He turned his attention to the girl.

He tried to bring pressure on her through her dad. The mayor told him there wasn't a chance, that his daughter wouldn't listen to him.

There was only one thing in the world she was interested in aside from the horse—a guy named Ames, Pete Ames, a gentleman jockey, a nice-looking kid who was a swell polo player and a swell steeplechase rider. But he didn't have any dough.

Kroul got Ames into an argument with Chuck Howden of the State Racing Commission, in one of Kroul's night clubs. The lights went out. When they were turned on Howden was dead and Ames had the gun in his hand. The kid swore he didn't do it, but it didn't buy him anything.

Kroul pretended to be his friend. He said if the kid would sign a confession to protect him, he'd take a chance and pitch the body out into the alley. The kid signed—almost anybody would have. He'd had a few drinks at the time, and he wasn't thinking too straight. Then Kroul went to Nora Grayson.

He showed her the confession and he put the cards, face up, on the table. He told her that either her horse lost the race Saturday, or he'd turn the confession over to the D. A.; that Pete Ames would be headed straight for the hot seat.

The girl had a lot of guts. She tried to fight back. She hired Sam Rising. Sam was one of the shadiest shysters in town, but he had a record for clearing his clients, and he played on the level with them.

Kroul tried to get to Rising. He sent Tiny Bliss to the office; and when Tiny walked in he found me sitting behind the desk and Rising out of town.

TINY looked me over with cold, gray eyes, sizing me up.

He said, "Listen, sport. You want to make some easy dough?"

I told him, "A bright guy never turns down easy dough."

The little man stared at me a moment longer, then he bobbed his head. "All right, pal. I'll give you a chance. Meet me over at Room

312 at the Charles Hotel, tonight at nine. We'll talk it over."

I said, "Why the Charles? Why don't we talk it over here?"

He grinned. "These walls just might be wired, see?" He turned and walked out.

At nine, I went up to the third floor of the Charles Hotel. I knocked and Tiny Bliss opened the door. It had been a nice place once. It wasn't so hot now, but the whiskey he handed me in a glass was. I downed it, him watching me; then I sat down in the chair.

He said, "You're new around here, aren't you?"

I told him, "Not so new. I've been around for about a year."

He said, "Funny, I never ran into you before."

I grinned.

"Maybe you haven't been in the right places."

He said, "Then maybe I'm not talking to the right guy. I didn't see your name on the door."

I told him, "I'm the brains behind Rising. I got into a jam in another State and I can't practice law myself, but I can figure out angles for other lawyers."

He said, "Oh, disbarred, huh?"

I told him, "We'll forget that angle. You said something about easy dough—"

He didn't beat about the bush. He said, "Your office is working for a girl named Nora Grayson. A friend of hers knocked off some guy. The cops haven't got hold of it yet, but there's a confession kicking around."

I told him, "We heard something like that."

He said, "O. K., I'll be frank with you. We don't care a thing about the punk that got killed. He was just some slob working for the State Racing Commission. But we do care who wins that race Saturday. We don't want Splendor to win."

I PLAYED it dumb. I said, "Who's 'we'? Who don't want Splendor to win?"

He said, "I might as well tell you. If you're half as smart as you pretend, you'll find it out anyway. Ed Kroul doesn't, and he's willing to pay real dough to see that that horse doesn't."

I said, "And where do I come into it? What do I have to do?"

He told me, "It's a cinch. All you got to do is contact Nora Grayson, tell her that you've seen that confession, and that if it ever gets to the D. A. her boy-friend hasn't got a chance in hell of missing the hot squat—then she'll be willing to talk turkey with us."

I said, "And what do you expect her to do?"

He said, "That's easy. All she's got to do is take her jockey off Splendor and have Mickie French ride him. We'll take care of French."

He drew a billfold from his pocket, brought out five crisp one-thousand-dollar bills and laid them on the table.

My hand went out toward them and a little gun peeked its way over the rim of his pocket. "Not so fast, redhead."

I told him, "I just wanted to see if they were real."

He grunted, "They're real, all right; don't worry about that. Play ball and they're yours."

I said, "Yeah, but what happens to me afterward? The girl'll tell Rising just as soon as he gets back to town, and I'll land in the street on my backside."

He said, "Don't worry about that, either. The boss always needs a lawyer—a guy who can figure an-

gles. You wouldn't have to go into court—just keep us out of trouble."

I pretended to be thinking it over. I said, "It sounds swell the way you tell it."

He said, "It could be swell if you'd play ball. The girl's downstairs in the bar. Go on down and break the bad news to her."

I hesitated a moment longer for appearances; then, I went out and got into the elevator, rode down to the lobby.

As I entered the bar, I noticed Kroul apparently trying his luck at one of the marble games. But I knew I was getting more attention than the pin-marbles.

NORA GRAYSON was sitting at the bar with a daiquiri in her hand, twisting the glass around and around without drinking. I slid onto the stool at her side.

"Hello, Miss Grayson," I said casually. "I'm from Sam Rising's office."

She turned to look at me with ice in her eyes. The ice disappeared when she heard Rising's name and fear leaped up into them instead. She said, "Yes?" eagerly.

I told her, "I got bad news. I've just read that confession Pete Ames signed. He hasn't got a chance in hell."

She started, then her eyes narrowed. "Who showed you the confession?"

I said, "Kroul's contact man—a little guy with a funny face. The thing's air-tight, nailed down, and Kroul's got four witnesses that'll swear they saw your boy-friend shoot."

She said, "They're lying!"

I shrugged. "A lot of guys lie in court, one way or another. The point is that you've got to think about Pete Ames. If you don't help him, no one will—because no one can."

Her fist clenched so that the knuckles showed white under the skin. "Kroul framed him. I know he didn't kill that man."

I didn't say anything. She wasn't talking to me. She was just thinking aloud. Suddenly the stiffness went out of her shoulders. "O. K., they win. What do they want me to do?"

I said, "Switch riders. Take your boy off and put Mickie French on."

She said, "That crook?"

I shrugged. "Look, Miss Grayson. They've got you licked; so there's no use trying to fight. After all, it's only a horse race. It's not as important as Pete Ames' life. I'm supposed to be your lawyer, and my advice to you is to let French ride, to call your trainer and tell him to make the change."

She stood up suddenly. "All right I'll do it. Have you got a nickel—Red?"

I passed her the coin. She took it and went into the phone booth. She left the door a little ajar and I could hear her talking to her trainer. While she was in there, Kroul sauntered out of the bar. He gave me a look from the corner of his eye when he passed.

From the way Nora was acting, I judged that the trainer was arguing. His name was Elliot, and he was an old-timer who had been around horses all his life. He'd had a lot of good horses, won a lot of big races, and he was as honest as they come. He evidently didn't like the idea of letting French ride Splendor and I didn't blame him, but the girl was giving the orders. A minute later she hung up and came back to where I was waiting for her.

"Got another nickel, Red?"

I gave her another and she went

back to the phone. I heard her call the Chancellor Hotel and ask for Mickie French.

I heard her say, "Mr. French, this is Nora Grayson. I wonder if you have an engagement for the Governor's Handicap? . . . You haven't. . . . Would you like the mount on Splendor? . . . You would? Can you come over here and talk to me about it? . . . Fine."

She hung up, turned and came back to me. "He's coming over at once."

I nodded. My job here was done. I said, "I'm sorry, Miss Grayson, but that was the only way out. I couldn't do anything else."

She said dully, "I understand. Good night."

CHAPTER II.

BOOKMAKER.

I LEFT the bar and went back upstairs in the elevator.

Tiny Bliss was waiting for me in the hotel room, and he was grinning. I guessed from his grin that French had already reported to him; that they thought everything was set and that the game was in their hands.

He said, "Good work, Red. Here." He drew some money from his pocket and passed it over.

I stared at it. There were five bills all right, but they were hundreds—not thousands.

"What's this?" I rapped.

He said, "Your dough for double-crossing that Grayson dame."

"Why you—" I started for him and again the little gun peeped at me above the pocket rim.

"Careful, Red! This little beauty doesn't make much noise. It would hardly be heard through that door, but it's deadly as hell."

I sneered at him. "Is that the one you used to kill Howden?"

He jumped at that, then he said, "You got your wires crossed. I didn't kill Howden. Pete Ames did."

I shrugged. "It doesn't matter to me who killed Howden or anybody else, but I want my dough. You're not going to get away with this double cross."

He said, "We have gotten away with it, punk. What do you think you're going to do about it?"

I told him, "I'm going down and tell Miss Grayson the whole layout. I'm going to tell her not to be a damned fool, not to let Mickie French ride her horse."

He said, "Oh, no, you're not! You want to know why?"

"I'll tell him why." A big man came out of the bathroom. The big man was Ed Kroul. He said, "I'll tell you why, Mr. Smith. We checked up on you, Red. Don't think we play it blind."

I sneered at him. "You haven't got anything on me."

He said, "Only that you were debarred in Omaha a year and a half ago for embezzling twenty-five thousand dollars from a client; that you got out on bail and skipped. Maybe the Omaha authorities would like to know where to find you—"

I looked at him. "Oh! It's that way?"

He nodded. "Yeah. It's that way. You stay in line and they won't find you, but try talking to Miss Grayson and see what happens. Or maybe we won't bother the Omaha authorities—maybe we'll just take care of you ourselves."

I said, "But hell! This is a double cross if there ever was one. You promised me five thousand and I get five hundred."

He said, "On second thought, I think five hundred's too much. Take two hundred and fifty of it back,

Tiny. Maybe Mr. Smith'll like it better that way."

Bliss moved forward with his gun I said, "Why don't you kill me like you did Howden?"

He said, "Maybe we will. Pass it over."

I HANDED the money over. The gun was small, but it looked dangerous as hell and I couldn't see any advantages in getting a slug in my chest.

He said, "I wouldn't leave you that much, but I want you to get out of town. Now, supposing you get going. Open the door for Mr. Smith, Tiny."

He opened the door and I walked out into the hall.

The staircase spiraled around the elevator. I stepped up into it and waited. I waited perhaps half an hour, then Bliss and Kroul came down the hall, paused before the elevator.

Before they could punch the button, I stepped out at their side. There was a gun in my hand now and my eyes were pretty hard.

I said, "I'll take the rest of that five grand, but first give me that hardware."

Bliss looked savage. He didn't want to hand over that gun. He took a look at me, at my rod, then he passed it over. Kroul had one, too. I stuffed them both into my pocket, then I went after the dough.

Bliss had the five thousand he'd shown me, and a couple of hundred to boot. Kroul had a couple of grand. I said, "I'll just keep this for interest, boys."

They swore at me. I said, "Forget about that. Punch that button and when the car comes up, get in and ride it down. Don't get any smart

"Not so fast, redhead."

ideas about stopping at the next floor and sneaking back. I'll be watching the indicator."

They punched the button. The car came up. I watched them get in, watched the door close, watched the indicator start downward. One thing that I was certain of—they wouldn't squawk to the cops, but I didn't stand around waiting.

I took the stairs, climbed up to the fourth floor. There was a man waiting for me in 409. I handed him the guns. "Have Dave check these."

I took the money I'd grabbed from Tiny and Kroul and stuffed it into an envelope. I gave that to the man, too. I wanted it for a certain purpose and if I ran into Tiny Bliss, I didn't want to have it on me. Then I went out, rode the elevator to the lobby and stepped out.

Neither Bliss nor Kroul was in sight. I went on through into the bar. Nora Grayson was seated in an end booth talking to Mickie French.

FRENCH was a little guy with a lined face. He'd been riding a long time and he had a bad reputation, but he was a good jockey. He could do anything with a horse that you could name, and the stewards hadn't been able to catch up with him.

He looked up when I paused at the end of the table and looked me over with dark, narrow eyes.

Nora Grayson said, "This is my lawyer, Mr.—"

"Smith," I told her, and shook hands with French.

He wanted me to go away. He'd evidently been doing all right with the girl—at least, he thought he had. But I didn't make any move to go away. I slid into a seat. Nora Grayson went on talking as if I weren't there.

She said, "I've always wanted to meet you, Mr. French. We have only one really great rider in each generation."

The guy was swelling up under her words. I could see his chest come out until I was afraid some of the buttons were going to snap off. He said, "Some of these punks don't know one end of a horse from another."

Nora Grayson told him, "You don't have to tell me that. The only trouble is, racing costs so much money. Everybody thinks I have a lot. In reality, I haven't. I'm practically broke."

He stared at her, startled. I could see that her words gave him a jolt. He said, "You broke? But I thought—"

She said, "I know what you thought. That's what everybody thinks, but they're wrong. I've got to make some money and, unless I make it racing, I don't know how I could make it."

French wet his lips. "It's pretty tough to make any real money racing."

I cut into the conversation. "It is if you play it strictly on the level."

He gave me a sharp look at that. He hadn't figured me as very important before. Now, he wasn't sure. He said, "What do you mean, sport?"

I told him, "Well, supposing—just supposing that a certain bookmaker in this town didn't want a certain horse to win; that he brought pressure to bear on the owner to switch riders, to put a crooked jock on the horse's back—"

French's face lost what little color it had. He looked suddenly like a ferret as he twisted his small body around to face me. His lips were snarling. "What the hell are you trying to say?"

I told him harshly, "Keep your

pants on and listen. I'm not mincing words, but I'm giving you a chance to play with Miss Grayson. All you've got to do to play with her right, is to win on that horse Saturday."

He said, "Win—" He was too startled to even pretend to cover up.

I said, "That's right—win. You spell it, w-i-n."

He said, "But what the hell! If that horse wins, that confession—" He caught himself.

I said, "Forget about the confession. Miss Grayson pulled a good act. They all think she's nuts about this guy Ames. Well, all she's interested in is taking Kroul for all the dough she can."

FRENCH was shaking his head. "I don't get it."

I said, "That's because you aren't as smart as you think you are. It's as simple as a-b-c. Miss Grayson's horse is already the favorite. Supposing she was to bet a hundred thousand dollars on it. She'd drive the price down to one to five, or less. She'd be putting up five dollars to win one.

"She can't make any money that way, but Kroul thinks he's got the race fixed. He thinks that, with you on Splendor's back, the horse can't possibly win. So, he'll take all the money that's offered him and probably give two-to-one odds. Do you get it?"

French wet his lips again. "Yeah, I get it, but—"

Nora Grayson turned on the heat, and the girl knew how. The smile she gave him made my pulses jump a little, and what it did to French was nobody's business.

The guy was an egotist. He thought that Mickie French was really big stuff, and that Nora Grayson had gone for him. He was all swelling up again, then he stopped swelling and the frown came back.

He said, "Yeah, but what Kroul will do to me—"

I said, "Never mind Kroul. I'll take care of him."

French jeered, "You and what army?"

The girl caught her breath suddenly. I twisted my head. Kroul and Tiny Bliss were standing in the doorway of the bar looking at us. When I turned, they moved on over to the counter and ordered a drink.

I said to French from the corner of my mouth, "Watch this, big boy."

I slid out of my seat and started across the room. Neither of them turned around, but they knew I was coming. I stepped up to the bar at their side. They were talking in low voices. They didn't pay any attention to me. I ordered a Tom Collins. When it came, I picked it up and deliberately poured it down Kroul's neck.

The big bookmaker swung around with a bellow. "What the hell—" he started.

I was grinning at him. I said, "You were so hot under the collar, I thought it would cool you off."

"Oh, you did—" He'd been a big shot around town for a long time. All the little punks were scared of him. Half the people at the bar knew who he was. Half the people at that bar hated him, but they were all afraid of him, and they were having a laugh.

He charged me, his big fists waving like a windmill. I took half a step backward, measured his jaw and cracked it with my right. It was like hitting a lump of concrete. Pain shot out from my knuckles, racing up my arm, numbing it. One of Kroul's hamlike fists caught me beside the head, spun me like a top and sent me crashing into the bar.

I bounced off as if it were rubber and hit him again, this time with my left. This time his head jerked back. His eyes crossed and his knees seemed to fold in like a deflated accordion. But he wasn't through.

He kept coming in. I hit him twice before he went down, and took a couple of haymakers in return. One of them raised a swell mouse under my left eye, just over the cheekbone. The other damn near tore my ear from my head. Then he was falling and I turned to face Bliss.

Some place, Tiny had gotten another gun. He must have borrowed it around the hotel. He hadn't had time to go out anywhere, but it was in his hand now. He stood there, hesitating. It was a pretty public place to shoot, but he shouldn't have hesitated. I didn't.

The toe of my thick oxford came up and hit his wrist, so hard that it nearly snapped the bone. The gun made a little arc as it went into the air, turning over and over like a slow-motion shot in a bum picture.

I caught it as it came down. There wasn't a sound in the bar—anywhere. Everyone sat there, on their hands, watching.

I swept a look around, then I stooped, wrapped my fingers into the collar of Kroul's coat, half dragged, half carried him to the door, and dumped him into the lobby.

I got there just as the cops came thronging in. The next thing I knew we were both in a radio car, riding toward headquarters.

CHAPTER III.

FIVE-GRAND DEAL.

THE cops thought they were tough; they shoved me around. It looked like I was headed for a cell, then I got the surprise of my life.

Kroul snapped out of it during the ride. He said to the sergeant, "Can't a couple of friends have an argument?"

The sergeant stared at his battered features. "Friends, is it? I'd hate to see what an enemy would do to you!"

Kroul managed a grin. It wasn't much of a success. He was pretty sore, but he managed to mask his feelings. He tried to put up my bail, but the cops wouldn't listen. It wound up by his bailing himself out and watching me being led downstairs.

Three hours later I turned into an all-night restaurant, bought an extra and sat down at a rear table and opened the paper. There was a late flash on page one. The headlines were:

EMBEZZLER ESCAPES POLICE; ATTORNEY FLEES THROUGH WINDOW

I read the story with interest.

Ray Smith, wanted in Omaha in connection with the theft of twenty-five thousand dollars from a former client, was arrested last night on a charge of disturbing the peace. Smith, who apparently has been in this city for the last year, engaged in a fist fight with a local gambler. The police arrested both men and at headquarters, Smith was recognized. He escaped through a window, let himself down from the ledge onto the roof of the building next door and eluded pursuit. He has not as yet been found.

I folded the paper, drank my coffee, and went out.

TINY BLISS was plenty surprised to see me. He was in pajamas when he opened the door—nice loud pajamas, with a purple background.

He said, "Where in the devil'd you come from?"

I pushed him out of the way and walked in. He'd been asleep and he wasn't thinking very clearly. He said, "What do you want?"

I told him, "A place to hide. The cops're on my trail and I'm in a spot."

He said, "What do the cops want you for? How the devil'd you get away?"

I pulled the paper out of my pocket, unfolded it and showed him the item. He read it in silence, then he said, "I got to ask Kroul about this."

I told him, "You ain't gonna ask anybody. You're not gonna open your trap."

He was pretty nervous. He said, "This is no time for us to get jammed up with the law. You know that race comes off tomorrow—today, I mean. It's after twelve."

I said. "It's a long way after twelve. It's damned near three and I want to get some eye-shut. Where do I sleep?"

He started to speak; then he didn't have a chance, for somebody was pounding on the door. He looked at me and I looked at him. "Who's that?"

A voice from the hall answered for me. "Come on, open up. It's the law!"

A heavy shoulder hit that door and it hadn't been built to stand anything like that. The door came in and there were a lot of cops thronging around.

Bliss was sputtering angrily. He said, "What do you mean breaking in here?"

The lieutenant told him, "Stop stalling, Tiny. We've got you—harboring a fugitive." They'd already snapped the cuffs on me.

Bliss was swearing loudly. "I wasn't harboring anybody, you fools! I didn't ask him to come up here. I was trying to get rid of him—"

The lieutenant said, "Tell it to the judge." He grabbed Tiny and started to walk him out. They got him out in the hall. One of the cops was standing pretty close to me, his service gun in his hand.

I reached across and grabbed it and shoved the gun into his middle. "All right, copper. Unlock these bracelets."

He unlocked the handcuffs and I tapped him alongside the head with his own gun. The lieutenant and the other cop had hold of Tiny. They weren't in any position to do anything. I backed across the apartment, went out through the rear door and ran down into the night.

The lieutenant took a couple of shots at me. The bullets went a long way over my head.

THE morning papers were full of it. Kroul was drinking coffee and reading the paper when I came into the restaurant and sat down at his table.

He stared at me with heavy eyes, then he started to get up. I said, "Sit down. Where do you think you're going?"

He said, "To call 'copper'! You're bad luck, redhead. You've caused everybody nothing but grief."

I told him, "Sit down," and showed him my gun.

He looked at it, his eyes widening. "Where'd you get that?"

I said, "From a cop. And it's a good one. Don't be a damned fool, Kroul. You don't think I skipped out on the boys twice, just to let the boys put me in again—"

He settled his bulk back in the chair. "What do you want?"

I said, "Enough dough to get out of town."

He told me, "What about the stuff you took away from me last night?"

I shrugged. "The cops have that down at headquarters. I didn't have time to stop and ask them for it when I was leaving."

He grinned a little. "You're plenty cool. I could use a guy like you—if you weren't so hot. But you're hotter than hell. It's suicide to have you around. G'wan, scram."

I said, "Look, Kroul. I'm in a spot. They've got the dragnet out for me. I won't have a chance by myself. With you helping, I might make it, but I'm not expecting you to help me for nothing. I'll make a trade with you."

He said, "And what's the trade?"

I told him. "Mickie French is planning to double-cross you this afternoon. The Grayson girl got to him. They're planning to let Splendor win."

Kroul's face got red. "Stop lying."

I said, "I'm not lying. Remember, I was talking to them when you came into the bar last night. They're planning to hand you a cold deck and make you like it."

He came half out of his chair. "I'll stop that. I'll scare hell out of that little rat, French."

I said, "That won't do you any good. The girl can still change jockeys. The thing to do is to get hold of her and keep her until after the race."

He was thoughtful. "That's an idea, but how the devil are we going to get hold of her?"

I said, "That's where I come in. Remember, she thinks I'm a friend of hers. If I call her up and tell her to meet me some place, she'll meet me. Then all you got to do is grab her, let French know that you got her and that he'd better stay in line, or else."

Kroul said, "And what do you want out of it?"

I said, "Five grand. And I want it now. You tried to cross me up once."

I could see his mind work behind his little eyes. He was figuring he could give me the five grand and then take it away from me. He said, "It's a deal. Listen. There's an old house out on North Moraine—8012. Get her out there. I'll have a guy to help you hold her."

I said, "What about the five grand?"

He told me, "I haven't got that much on me."

I said, "Get it. Your check ought to be good for it."

He said, "I'll have to go out to get it."

I nodded and he rose. I hated to see him walk out. He might call the cops and spoil everything. But he didn't. He came back in twenty minutes with the dough.

He said, "O. K., redhead, but don't try to cross me."

I said, "To cross you now would be cutting off my nose and stepping on it."

I told Kroul to get me a car and a driver, then I called the girl. I arranged for her to meet me a couple of blocks from her home, went out, got in the car that Kroul had called and told the driver where to go."

CHAPTER IV.

GIRL BAIT.

THE driver was a short guy, with a nose that someone had battered back into his flat face. He turned the car around and we drove toward the corner.

The girl was already there waiting, but I almost didn't go through with the play. Pete Ames was with her. She came over to the car.

She said, "Pete was at the house when you called. He wouldn't let me come alone."

The driver was watching her. I said, "Get in."

She hesitated, and we didn't have any time to waste. I pulled the gun out of my pocket and showed it to them. "Get in."

They got in. I ran a hand over Ames, found that he was clean.

The driver started the car with a jerk. I guess he was nervous. I was a little nervous myself. We had to go clear across town. Any of the traffic cops at the corners could have made a mess of things by recognizing me. None of them did.

The house on Moraine was a big, old-fashioned, wooden affair. Kroul had used it for a gambling joint once. There was still some of the equipment scattered around. We all walked into a big upstairs room and the driver went away to call Kroul.

Pete Ames paced up and down like a nervous cat. The girl said, "Take it easy, Pete. There's nothing to worry about."

"Nothing to worry about—" He swung around. "With you kidnaped? In danger of your life?"

She said, "I'm in no danger. Red, here, is the undercover man for the State Racing Commission—"

I tried to stop her, but it was too late. She'd already said it. Ames had stopped his pacing and was staring at me.

A voice from the doorway at my back said, "Oh—so you're an undercover dick—"

I started to turn, but Kroul's voice said, "Hold it!"

I was swearing under my breath. If the girl hadn't spoken when she had, the play would have been in our hands. Now it wasn't. We were in a hell of a jam. I shot a look at the girl. She was out of the line of fire, off to one side. I decided to take a chance.

I SPUN, throwing myself sideways to one knee as I did so, jerking the cop's gun from my pocket. But I never got a chance to shoot at Kroul.

For Ames jumped forward and hit me from behind. I went over onto my nose and in the next minute Kroul landed on me, too. There wasn't much breath left in me. It's lucky my ribs were strong. If they hadn't been, all the air would have been squeezed out of my lungs. As it was, I was gasping for breath when they took my gun and jerked me to my feet.

Kroul slapped me hard. "That's for last night!" He was mad. "So, you're an undercover man for the State Racing Commission? What's your name?"

I said, "Drake."

There wasn't any use of not answering, and the longer I could stall, the better chance we had. I'd told the cops to close in on the place, but they weren't to close in for another good half-hour. I'd wanted to be sure that Kroul was there when they did.

I hadn't been able to tie Kroul into Howden's killing. I had Bliss. We'd checked the little gun I'd taken away from him the night before against the bullets they'd dug from Howden's chest. That meant that Bliss fired the shot, but it didn't prove anything against Kroul and he'd been the one I wanted to get.

The girl was staring at Pete Ames with widening eyes. "Pete? I don't understand—"

I told her, "Ames has been one of Kroul's men all along. We knew that, but we couldn't prove it. I talked it over with your father and he told me that you'd never believe us; that we'd have to prove it to you, to make you believe."

She said, "But what about the confession—"

I grinned at her sourly. "There never was a confession. I mean, there never was any danger of their turning a confession over to the cops. Ames and Kroul framed that just to make you keep Splendor from winning the race. They thought you'd be so scared that you wouldn't even argue. But when you hired Sam Rising to defend Pete, they didn't know for a minute what to do."

She said, "You mean to tell me that they killed Howden just to keep Splendor from winning that race?"

I shook my head. "No. Howden had been investigating their activities for the racing commission. We don't know what he found out, but he found out something. They had to kill him. They didn't expect you to tell your father about that confession, either. They didn't know that he'd come right to the racing commission with it."

Kroul was staring at me. That's what I wanted him to do. I wanted to get him curious, to make him ask questions, so I'd have a chance to keep talking. The longer I talked, the more chance we had to live.

He said, "But how'd you get in Rising's office?"

I told him, "The mayor brought some pressure on Sam. We got him to go out of town, then we got one of your men who's been stooling to us to suggest to Bliss that he might get to Rising."

Kroul's face was very red. "You mean that the whole thing was an act?"

I nodded. "From the start. You thought I was unlucky for you. It wasn't luck, big shot. It was all arranged."

He swore under his breath. "Then why'd you have me grab the girl this morning? Why—"

His face changed.

I REALIZED that he'd guessed the answer.

"Oh, so you wanted to get me on a kidnap rap? Well, you won't do it." He looked at the driver. "Guido! Knock these two punks on the head. We'll take them out in the country and lose them."

I said, "Wait, Kroul. You can't get away with that. The cops knew what we were doing. If they'd find our bodies, you'll be tied into it."

He grunted, "I know where there's a lime pit, Drake. Don't worry, they're not going to find your bodies for a long time. Come on, Guido, snap into it!"

The girl looked toward Ames quickly. "Pete! Won't you help us? Won't you—"

He snarled at her, "Shut up, you fool! Come on, Guido."

The little Italian moved in, his lips drawn back a little from his yellowed teeth. His eyes had a glazed look, and I knew suddenly that he was a born killer; that he would kill for the joy of it, if for no other reason. There hadn't been any sign of the cops. Another minute and it would be too late. They couldn't do us any good.

I jumped straight at the little Italian. It seemed like suicide, but

if I had to die it was better to die fighting. The jump surprised him. He hadn't expected me to move. He'd expected me to stand there like a duck in the shooting gallery, waiting for the end. It took an instant for his brain to transfer the order to his hands, and in that instant I was on top of him.

My shoulder crashed against his chest as his gun exploded. The bullet tore through my side, the force of it turning my body half around. But I didn't stop. There are moments in life when you seem to have the strength of ten men. It was one of those moments for me.

I caught up the little Italian, swung him in an arc, helpless, and pitched him directly into Kroul's face. The big bookmaker had been standing there, crouched, trying for a shot without hitting the Italian. They went over onto the floor together.

The girl had been motionless. I took Pete Ames in a diving tackle, shouting for her to run. I didn't have time to see whether she did or not.

Ames was stronger than he looked. Years of riding, of handling horses, had given him powerful wrists. His fingers gripped at my throat, pushing me backward, shutting off my air. Another minute or two and I would have been unconscious, but I got a foot into his stomach and heaved.

It broke his grip at my throat, sent his body sliding backward along the floor. I kicked him in the jaw as I lay there, saw his head snap back, then twisted. I'd wondered why neither Kroul nor Guido had jumped on my back. I saw now.

THE girl had leaped in. She hadn't run as I told her to. She'd snatched up Guido's gun from where it had fallen to the floor and stood there with it leveled on the two men.

Even as I turned, Guido leaped toward her, grabbed her wrist. They struggled for the gun. It exploded with roaring sound and the bullet struck Kroul, who was charging in from the side.

He stopped in his tracks, hesitated for a moment, swaying there like a big tree which needs but a single stroke of the ax to send it crashing down. Then he went over. I think he was dead before he hit the floor. But I had no time to think of that.

Guido had wrenched the gun from the girl, thrown her to one side and,

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MR. AND MRS. SHERLOCK HOLMES

A COUPLE OF HIGHBROWS TAKE A COURSE IN HUMAN RELATIONS—AND TANGLE WITH SOME LOWBROW SPECIMENS!

BY RICHARD L. HOBART

Mr. and Mrs. Sherlock Holmes

CHAPTER I.

HUMAN RELATIONS.

HONEST, I didn't have a thing to do with naming myself.

If fond parents decided on calling me Prunella, I couldn't do a thing about it; and when that is added to Quigg, my last name, the result is pretty awful. But that terrible name doesn't keep me from being a pretty hotsy steno—I mean secretary—and Professor Bolivar Beane, head of the Department of Applied Psychology at Centerville College for Women, thinks I am fairly *umph.*

I guess, though, that's because I can decipher the scribblings he puts on paper and calls writing. Only he'd call it chirography, which is a six-bit word meaning the same thing. Now, Professor Bolivar Beane isn't such an old stick-in-the-mud as you've probably second-guessed by now.

He's really nice. He is tall and a bit on the thin side; young, has nice blue eyes, a long thin nose, yellow hair that's forever in need of comb and brush, and a pointed yet firm chin that tells he's plenty determined to get along. If he is scholarly most of the time, it isn't because he's affecting a pose but that he doesn't know quite *all* the facts of life and actually believes people act that way.

He's a very methodical and thorough person. If he asks you what time it is, he doesn't want you to tell him it's about a quarter after four when it's really 4:15:41.

So when the buzzer sounded three times—which is a pretty good indication to me he's excited—I glanced at the clock, for I knew the first thing he'd ask would be the time when all he had to do was look up and there was the wall clock right in front of his eyes.

I went into his office and he absent-mindedly waved me to a seat beside his desk. He was staring off into space.

But I saw something on his desk, piled high as my head, that brought a gasp of astonishment to my lips—detective magazines!. I was dumfounded.

Often I'd heard Bollie go into lengthy discourses, as he called them, about wasting time reading anything except learned treatises on what makes one's mind click. And that was the reason I was careful not to tell him I had a room full of detective magazines and read them all the time!

He pretended not to notice my look of utter astonishment. He ran long fingers through his yellow hair, asked:

"Er . . . Prunella, what time is it?"

I grinned, for I was expecting it. "Four-seventeen, fifty-eight," I told him, looking at the clock.

"Prunella Quigg," he said in his usual nasal voice, "you now have been my secretary for three years, four months, seventeen days—"

"—Eight hours, eighteen minutes and fifteen seconds, Professor Beane," I told him, glancing again at the wall clock.

"Admirable, Prunella, admirable!" Professor Beane exclaimed, a happy smile lighting his thin face. He adjusted the horn-rimmed glasses on his long nose. "I'm delighted to know you are so painstaking in the matter of detail. Most people with red hirsute adornment are, you know. Er . . . that is why I had you in."

He was thoughtful for a moment, then leaned toward me, thin face alight with something more than scholarly enthusiasm.

"Prunella Quigg," he said, voice shaking a bit with excitement, "I . . . we . . . are clandestinely embarking into the field of human relations!"

"HUMAN relations?" I echoed, puzzled. Was this his way, at last, of proposing?

"Yes, Prunella," he said. "In less educated and erudite minds, it would be called a detective agency. In other words, we shall concern ourselves with the motives of why people turn to crime, the *modus operandi* of criminals, and the *causa proxima* behind it all.

"Is it because of an inferiority complex which makes its victim decide to prove that his mind is so superior, a crime may be committed without disastrous personal outcome? Is it because of some perverted, inhibited condition? We shall find out, Prunella; and in the learning, I shall be better qualified to tell my classes how to study, how to delve more deeply into the quirks of the human mind."

I blinked. "But . . . but . . ." I protested, "detectives have to deal with low criminals, and you—"

"I know, Prunella." He airily waved the protest aside. "Oftentimes, we'll have to deal with desperate and despicable characters. Why, I've read time and again in the daily press, and the . . . er . . . detective magazines, they frequently use the Thomas gun on their dupes—"

"You wouldn't by any chance be referring to a Tommy gun?" I asked, smothering a giggle.

"Ah . . . er . . . yes, Prunella. Your choice of the proper diminutive shows an amazingly facile grasp of the subject. You will be invaluable to me. The . . . er . . . weapon is properly termed a Thompson submachine gun, I believe. I find the vernacular is rather difficult to learn. The . . . ah . . . term, Tommy gun, is expressive. I'll use it in the future."

"But why all the detective magazines?" I questioned, nodding at the imposing pile of them on the desk.

He didn't even blush. He reached for one and, when he looked at me, excitement showed on his face.

"It's . . . ah . . . amazing, Prunella," he said enthusiastically. "I find I was entirely wrong about the detective periodicals. Their contents are most stimulating. In fact, many of the stories border on the erudite, psychologically speaking. I find perusing them makes my mind clearer, tends to lift me out of myself as it were."

"I've read . . . er . . . one or two myself," I admitted.

It was all I could do to keep from howling. Bollie had been rabid against detective stories in the past, and that he enjoyed reading them now was funny. And I saw where he got the idea to start a detective agency!

"Have you, indeed?" Bollie cried. "That is splendid! We must read them a great deal, as I find they contain extraordinary tips on how to foil those with the criminal tendency. Take this one here, for example."

BOLLIE held up a magazine. It had a picture on the cover in vivid reds and greens showing a keen-eyed detective holding off a desperate criminal, while behind the law officer a red-headed vixen had a knife raised to stab him in the back.

It was *Wonderful Detective Tales,* my favorite of them all.

"For the sake of brevity, I call this one WDT," Bollie explained. "It has some meritorious fiction in it. I find myself favorable to several of the series characters. One of them, a Mr. Phil Dare, is an unusually clever and resourceful young newspaper reporter habitually thrown into situations where only detective work of the highest character will save his life. He is a likable young scalawag even though I find some of his bon mots difficult for one of my . . . er—" Bollie flushed, as he didn't want to admit some of Phil Dare's wisecracks went over his head.

"Then," Bollie continued, "there's another character—Mr. Roamer Rawson. I should say he is the best detective type in America. He works only on international cases—espionage, crooked munitions deals, and things like that. Why, once he kept America out of war with a belligerent nation!" Bollie's face was flushed, and I gasped. He took the fictional hero as a living, breathing person!

"Now," Bollie resumed, "take these bold bank robberies with which the countryside has been afflicted of late. It's a rather certain fact that a Mr. Dodo Decker is at the head of this gang. Judging from his success, he is nothing like his name. The dodo part, I mean.

"This Dodo Decker must have the lambent flame of genius within him. Warped, to be sure, but his robberies show unmistakable generalship. I think"—and Bollie made the statement as calmly as if he were talking about a subjugated personality before his class—"we shall first bend our energy toward the capture of this menace."

"Dodo Decker!" I gasped. Bol . . . Professor Beane, listen! This Dodo Decker is poison, a ruthless killer! He'd Tommy-gun you so quick you wouldn't know what hit you! Why—"

"I find Mr. Phil Dare has a stock expression he uses when deprecating the . . . er . . . snap judgment of others who speak unthinkingly, Prunella," Bollie said calmly.

"And that is?" I prompted.

"Purely a colloquialism, Prunella. *Baloney* is the word to which I refer." He nodded with evident satisfaction. Then: "I have something here that makes all men equal." He took an object from his pocket and held it before my eyes.

"Professor Beane!" I gasped. It was a revolver!

HE nodded, face flushed. "I have other necessary . . . er . . . requisites of our new avocation, Prunella, including one of those candid cameras." He patted his pocket. He was tickled with himself.

I guess I was frowning. Here was a nice guy talking about Tommy guns and Dodo Decker, and who thought knights still galloped around in golden armor rescuing blondes in distress! But I'd go along with him!

"You seem perturbed, Prunella," he told me.

"I am," I admitted. "It's easy enough to *say* you plan opening a detective agency—"

"Investigators in human relations," he corrected with a frown.

"Well, call it anything you want, but the fact remains it's going to be hard to get cases. How do you figure to hear of people who want detecting done?"

"You mean investigating, Prunella. Well," he said slowly, "of course we haven't a system of stool birds built up yet, but—"

"Stool birds?" I was really puzzled now.

"Why, yes. You know, those unfortunate people of the underworld who inform the police of criminals, crimes, and where the culprit may be located."

"Oh, stool pigeons!"

"Exactly!" Professor Beane was delighted. "If I didn't know, Prunella, that you were a very estimable young woman, I'd say that perhaps you were a habitué of the demi-monde."

"Professor!" I cried, blushing.

"There, there, Prunella; I was only having a bit of fun." His face became thoughtful again. "But to answer your question. I don't want you to think I am going into debt with this avocation of ours. I can well afford it. As you know, a month ago my aunt died and left me her estate. Imagine my surprise last week to learn from her attorneys that what I thought to be a mere pittance, actually is well over two million dollars."

"Two million dollars!"

Boy! Hot ziggity-zig! I'd had an idea the only reason Bollie had not popped the question was because he didn't make an awful lot of money. Now, with all those smackers, it'd be coming soon. Orange blossoms, a five-carat engagement ring, Europe—

He must have read my mind. He blushed and ran a hand through his hair. "Well . . . er . . . Prunella, *after* I have delved deeply into this subject, *after* I have, with your aid, written my treatise on human relations that . . . er . . . then I shall want to ask . . . er—"

I got it! I knew Bollie's mind well enough to know it was of the single-track variety. When he got something in it, there was nothing else to be done but work it out.

At the moment, it was human relations, just a high-sounding name for a plain detective agency, and hell or high water wouldn't have changed it. I nodded and saw him give a sigh of relief.

"Again back at the point in question, Prunella," he said. "I already have rented a suite of offices across town. Signs are on the windows and doors—Investigations In Human Relations—and I have furnished everything in the latest mode. I plan on taking you there immediately, so you can look things over."

"Big boy, I'm ready!" I jumped to my feet.

Bollie smiled. "I take it from your rather appealing patois, Prunella, that you are eager to enter this new experience with me." He sighed. "Money—money for experimentation—for research—for—"

"For a new hat," I interrupted, tossing him his old black felt. "Come on, let's scar-ram!"

CHAPTER II.

DODO.

BOLLIE and I jumped into his traffic-mutilated sedan and within twenty minutes parked in front of a building across town. It was just five o'clock. This was a medium-class neighborhood. Mostly foreigners lived here of a solid, and stolid, working class. Today, Friday, was a pay day, and the banks were still open to receive deposits.

Well, we managed to find a parking place in front of the McDermott Building. Our offices, Bollie told me, were on the top floor. I got to *the sidewalk and waited for him.* Inside, a branch bank occupied a ground-floor office; and there were long queues of men waiting their turns at the tellers' windows.

"You can't park there," rasped a voice from behind me.

I turned.

The man who spoke was big, had just one eye and it was red as blood. His face looked like it had been knocked out of shape and then had jelled on him; his jaw was undershot, craggy. Ex-pug, I decided.

"Sorry," Bollie told him. "The streets are free to taxpayers. First come, first served. Anyway, I've just leased a suite of offices on the sixth floor of this building and tenants have peference." He nodded as if that ended the matter.

"Say—" The big man started for Bollie, his one eye glaring and his fists knotted into hams. Bollie paled a bit, but held his ground. The big man drew back his fist to strike.

Then it happened. There was the sound of shots from within the branch bank, then wild shouting and more shots. I looked into the bank

"I'll take that camera, bo!"

and saw a group of three men huddled together and walking with quick steps toward the door. In their hands were small satchels and —big black automatics! It was a bank robbery!

"My word!" Bollie exclaimed. I shot a glance at him and saw that his face was flushed with excitement, his breathing fast, wide blue eyes snapping. Then I saw something that really worried me. Bollie dragged a small oblong of black from his pocket, pulled at one side of it. The next moment he had the black gadget up to his eye and was squinting at the bank robbers who'd just reached the sidewalk.

I heard sharp little clicks, whirling sounds. Bollie's face was tense, his jaw very determined.

"I'm getting 'em, Prunella!" he cried softly. "Every one of 'em has looked directly at me, and their faces will show up—"

"I'll take that camera, bo!" snarled a voice.

I gasped. The one-eyed man had a gun as big as a cannon in Bollie's ribs. I was scared silly. The man with the one red eye was the lookout for the gang!

Then everything happened at once. I heard the roar of a motor and a powerful car squealed to a stop behind us in the street. Bollie very calmly turned and took two quick shots of it with his tiny camera.

The one-eyed man grabbed for it, but Bollie ducked. There were explosions of firing and the three bank robbers tore past us, hopped into the waiting car. The one-eyed man grappled with Bollie.

"Slug!" The command yelped from the direction of the car.

Slug, the one-eyed man, turned loose of Bollie, dived for the street. I saw Bollie still had the camera. He squinted through the finder thing and got another picture of the car, this time with Slug backing into it, his cannon raised and pointed at Bollie.

I screamed, threw myself on Bollie just as Slug pulled the trigger. I heard the sound of the explosion, felt the breath of the lead as it whistled close to my face. Followed another explosion, but it must have been wild, for all I saw was Bollie taking another picture of the rear of that bandit car as it got under way.

He turned, grinned at me, carefully tucked the camera into his pocket. All was confusion around us. Cars were starting after the disappearing bandits, police whistles blowing, people milling about in mad crowds. Bollie and I slipped away, stepped into an elevator and got off at the sixth floor.

A SIGN in glistening fresh platinum paint on a door read: "INVESTIGATORS IN HUMAN RELATIONS, INC." Professor Beane gripped my arm in breathless excitement, grinned at my look of surprise.

"I forgot to tell you, Prunella," he said as he unlocked the door, "that you are vice president of the company. Your . . . er . . . remuneration of one hundred dollars a week is—"

"A hundred smackers a week!" I interrupted. "Gosh, Bollie!" I was too excited to say anything else.

He threw open the door, bowed. "Enter, my fair lady, he said.

I went into the room, gasped. What a joint! It was simply gorgeous. Everything was chromium and silver. Desks, chairs, rugs, drapes, furnishings—everything in platinum metal or silver cloth.

"You . . . you like it?" he asked anxiously, his face boyishly eager.

"It . . . it's just too much for words," I told him.

It pleased him. He grinned like a kid given his first air rifle. He led the way to an inner office overlooking the street, sat behind an infernal-engine-looking thing that turned out to be a silver metal desk, waved me to a modernistic chair.

I was about breathless now with reaction. Those murderous men on the street below, the shooting, and Bollie calmly standing up in the midst of it all and casually taking candid camera pictures! "T-Those men," I whispered. "They'll shoot you . . . us . . . on sight after what you did! I . . . I'm frightened!"

"Bosh, likewise baloney, Prunella," Bollie grinned at me. "They won't know where to find us. Anyway, they're too intent now on making a run of it. In the vernacular, they're lamming." He beamed at his own ability to use the term. He got to his feet, took the candid camera from his pocket.

"I have a complete photographic room installed and we can develop these shots. Come along and I'll show you how it's done. Incidentally, all these rooms are air-conditioned and soundproofed."

WE passed into a room in which I saw neat steel drawers, cabinets and shelves lining three of the walls. I frowned, wondered what they contained. Bollie grinned.

"Our arsenal," he explained. "I've been enabled to install a collection of weapons that will help us capture such creatures as those we saw below. My favorite, Roamer Rawson of the detective magazines, always has the correct weapon for any and every occasion."

He opened a steel cabinet and I gasped. Inside were two machine guns, with row after row of disks, each one bristling with bullets! Other drawers contained tear-gas containers, flares and ammunition.

"Heavens!" I gasped. I was trembling now. Bollie, as I've always known, never did things by halves.

"Now, Prunella," Bollie said with an eager grin, "we'll develop the pictures and see what these fellows look like." He turned toward another door and I followed. "I'm interested in seeing the faces of these men, and—"

"Yeah, and *we're* interested, too!"

I turned, screamed at the menace in the words and what I saw. Bollie just turned, but his face was white, his lips straight and taut.

Standing in the door were three men, all of them with guns pointed toward us! One I recognized immediately as the man with the red eye, Slug. To one side of him was another man I knew as being the driver of the getaway car. Then I recalled that Bollie had told Slug he had offices on the sixth floor. No wonder they'd found us so soon!

The third man was tall and slim, had black hair, sharp dark eyes, a disappearing chin. There was cruelty in his pasty white face, in the snarl of his thin lips. I knew who he was. I'd seen that ugly mug too many times in the newspapers to miss it this time in the flesh.

Sure, it was the kill-crazy bank robber—Dodo Decker!

CHAPTER III.

GUNS AND WORDS.

"Truly astonishing," Bollie murmured.

"What!" snapped Dodo Decker.

"Your . . . er . . . types," Bollie told him. "The man with the inter-

esting name of Slug is what is known as the prognathous type. That means he has a jaw shaped like the front of a . . . er . . . five-ton truck. Hardly ever will you find this type possessing more than very slightly convoluted brain surfaces. You, my dear Dodo Decker, and the man by your side, are quite low in the gnathic index. In other words, possessing the slight or rabbit type chin. Criminals, I see—"

"Are you nuts?" rasped out Dodo Decker.

Bollie looked at the gang leader in surprise. "Aren't we all?" he asked incredulously. "My dear fellow, you are positively naïve! *All* humans have some one little quirk, some tiny idiosyncrasy that—"

"Talk United States," Slug snarled, stepping forward.

"I forgot," Bollie apologized, "you . . . er . . . gentlemen are rather deficient in readily understanding the speech of an educated man. I presume it is caused by a somewhat atrophied condition of the right and left hemispheres of the brain." His grin was casual.

I was about to scream again. Here was Bollie, in a professor's language, telling this trio of thugs they were dumb bunnies and getting by with it. If they could understand! I shivered.

"I gotta notion to shoot you two smart-Alecks full of holes," Dodo Decker said to us, and I paled.

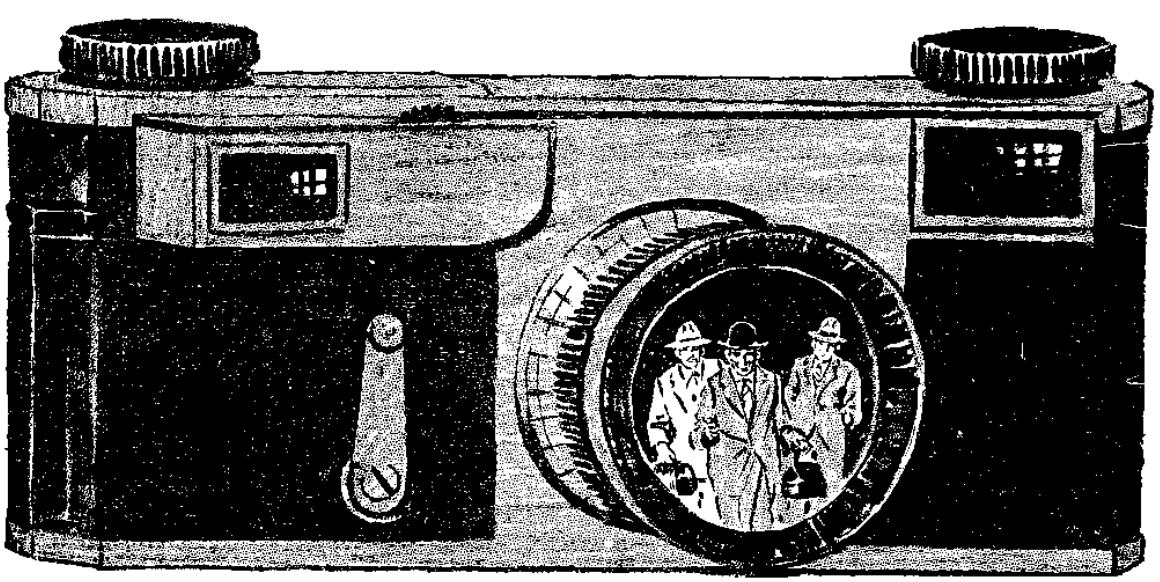
"Well, I'll have a cigarette first," Bollie said casually. He leaned over a desk near the door, opened a chromium cigarette case and selected a smoke. I frowned. Bollie seldom smoked.

Bollie picked up the electric cigarette lighter from the desk and soon the little grill was red-hot. He stuck it to the cigarette, puffed. "Cigarettes *are* restful to the nerves," he said to Dodo Decker.

"Pass 'em around," Dodo commanded. He reached for the cigarettes.

"Allow me," Bollie said quickly. He opened the lid, took out cigarettes for all three of them and held the electric lighter.

"Nice layout you got here," Dodo remarked, an ugly smirk on his lips. "Overheard you say a while ago this joint was soundproof. Good thing. The police'll think we're lamming, and'll never have the brains to look for us here. I'm taking the pictures, and you two had better keep away



from all these guns you got parked around. And after I get the pictures, I'm rubbing out you two punks!"

"K-k-killing us!" Bollie quavered. then: "W-what for? You'll have the . . . the pictures. We can't harm you, and—"

"Yeah, I'm killing you," Dodo snarled. "Because you think you're so smart. I heard you talking. A detective agency!" His sneer made his lips curl wolfishly. "All I'm interested in is rubbing out you two and taking all the Tommy guns and ammunition we can carry with us."

SLUG'S fist flashed out and caught Bollie flush on the point of the jaw. Bollie went headlong, cracked against the wall, slid slowly to the floor. I saw that his eyes were glazed, half-closed. I ran to him.

Slug laughed. "The skirt is in love with the punk! My Gawd, what a pair of phonies! Detectives!"

The next moment I was on him. My fingernails dug a long scratch across the stubble of his cheek. I tried for his eyes, but he was too quick for me. His hand slapped out and caught me across the mouth. I went to the floor, breathless. Blood ran down my chin and I remember wiping my mouth with the hem of my dress. Then I put it down, quick. For Slug said:

"Say-y-y, she *has* got pretty stems!"

"Beast!" I snapped at him.

He laughed with the rest.

Bollie got to his feet, towered above me. He looked down and the dazed expression was still on his face.

Then he saw the trickle of blood from the corner of my mouth. He scowled, seemed to take a long time to understand what it was. I saw his blue eyes harden, become frozen balls of agate. He screamed, jumped forward and struck Dodo Decker squarely in the eye with his fist!

Dodo yelled out a surprised curse, tried to dodge Bollie's second blow. But Bollie was too quick for him. The little man whose name I didn't know was circling them, gun raised for a shot as soon as Dodo got in the clear. I screamed and threw myself on him.

He tried to throw me off. Slug leaped for me, but I stuck out a leg, tripped him. Slug dropped his gun. I plowed across the floor on my tummy and reached it first. I didn't know how to shoot the thing, but I had it in my hand and the handle part fitted nicely into my palm. My forefinger was around a curved something and I pulled back.

The shot sounded like thunder in the room. I tried to scream as I saw Bollie stagger back, a streak of red across his cheek. I'd almost killed him! But he didn't fall over.

"You devils!" came in Dodo's rasping voice that made my flesh crawl. "Put your hands up or I'll shoot hell outta you!"

And Bollie and I put up our hands —quick!

CHAPTER IV.

BUTTON, BUTTON!

BOY, was I scared!

Bollie's face was a pale blob and all bloody where my shot had creased his cheek. My lip wouldn't stop bleeding, and I had blood all down the front of my dress.

Dodo Decker was mad. He was cursing like a sailor, holding a handkerchief to his swollen eye where Bollie had slugged him, and trembling with rage.

Slug, a funny expression on his face, was wincing with the pain of

my scratches. Every once in awhile he'd glare over at me and say: "Hellcat!"

He meant it, too. Given half a chance, he'd have pulled up one of Bollie's Tommy guns and filled me full of lead. It'd be safe to do that, too. The offices were soundproofed and there wasn't a chance of the noise getting to the halls or street.

It looked like Investigations In Human Relations was to go out of business before it started.

I didn't see a chance to get out of it, not a chance. Three desperate men with guns in a soundproofed office! They could shoot us and it might be days before we were found, and all over a few yards of tiny pictures that Bollie had been foolish enough to take!

Bollie walked close to me. Dodo, Slug and the thin-faced man had takn the roll of film from the candid camera and the former touched a match to it. He threw the camera to the floor as the film flared up.

"Prunella," Bollie said softly.

I looked at him and all of a sudden my eyes felt funny. I didn't care so much about what happened to me. But Bollie! And I'd almost killed him! Gee, I like this funny guy.

I'm red-headed, have more freckles than I want to see when I look into the mirror, and wouldn't cause much commotion in a beauty contest. But, honest, my teeth are my own, my hair is red by nature's work, and my . . . er . . . stems aren't so bad at that in chiffons.

"Prunella," Bollie said. "I . . . I tried to do just what Roamer Rawson would do, and . . . and I failed." He felt miserable, I could see. "I . . . I'm a failure, Prunella," he faltered.

"I understand . . . Bollie," I told him softly. "And . . . and I almost k-killed you." It was the first time I'd ever called him that to his face, and he looked startled for a moment. His eyes became normal again, very blue and shining.

"Ain't it a pretty sight, them two?" Slug sneered from across the room. He advanced toward us, and Bollie held me close to him in protection. They could do anything now! Just so long as Bollie held me—

Slug tore Bollie away, threw him across the room where he brought up against the desk. Slug had put his gun away now. I looked across the room and saw that only Dodo had one showing. But it was an automatic, and looked very menacing there as it pointed toward Bollie.

"Roamer Rawson wouldn't jump at a man with a gun, Bollie," I screamed at him as I saw Bollie stiffen, his eyes slit in hate.

Bollie relaxed, nodded. "No, guess you're right, Prunella," he said. "Roamer Rawson is too great a detective for that. He'd wait his time, *think* things out."

I BREATHED easier. Bollie was his old self again, and I knew his really remarkable brain was working at tremendous speed to try and think something out. But what could it be? We were trapped—

"Roamer Rawson?" Dodo Decker asked, puzzled. "Who's he?"

"You wouldn't know, my orthognathous clodpoll," Bollie grinned at him. "But I'll tell you this: Roamer Rawson is the second greatest detective in the world. Only one man living is greater—only one man can out-Rawson Rawson, or maybe you don't follow me." Bollie grinned impishly across at him.

"And who's this guy who can out-Raw . . . er . . . who's greater than the punk you're talking about?" Dodo snarled.

Bollie swelled up his chest, struck it with a blow from his fist. "I am that man, Mr. Dodo Decker! I, Professor Bolivar Beane, expert in the field of human relations, expert psychologist and psychiatrist, omnipotent of brain, thorough of method—*I* am greater than Roamer Rawson!"

"Baloney," Slug sneered.

"*Tsk, tsk,*" admonished Bollie severely. "That mundane and trite expression is clever only in the mouth of Mr. Phil Dare of the detective magazine. You poor groping clods think you can overcome us! Why, listen—" Bollie turned to the cigarette case on the desk and threw back the lid, held the lighter to it and puffed furiously.

"I wouldn't be surprised," Bollie rattled on, "if the police weren't on the way here right now! They'll come in with guns flaming, with those . . . those billy things flailing, with tear gas aswirl, with . . . with—"

Bollie had to stop for breath. Then he started again. "Those of you who are alive will be tried before a court of justice. There will be an unimaginative jury, a stern judge and he'll pass sentence." Bollie was yelling now. "It'll be the squat seat—"

"The hot seat, Bollie," I corrected.

"Yeah, that's it, the squat . . . er . . . hot squat . . . ah . . . hot seat! The energy will be turned on, gentlemen, and you'll fry, sizzle—"

I had my mouth open now in sheer astonishment. Had Bollie gone crazy? He was yelling things that were mad. The three bank robbers were across the room watching him with open mouths. Dodo, the only one with a gun, had dropped his gun arm. The thin-faced man and Slug just stared.

Then Dodo, a terrible look of murder lust on his face, stepped forward, slowly raised his gun.

"I'm shooting you punks right now!"

Everything went blurry. I saw Bollie with his hand in the cigarette box for another smoke. I saw the gun come up, the muzzle pointed straight at Bollie's heart. I opened my mouth to scream.

There was the sound of a cannon exploding. Then a mighty voice filled the room, rasped out a command that brought a sob of relief to my lips. For the mighty voice said:

"You devils! Put your hands up or I'll shoot hell outta you!"

DODO screamed. Quick as a flash he wheeled, shot four times into the wall behind him!

Bollie knifed across the space between him and Dodo like a shot from a gun. He got Dodo's gun hand in both his own, pulled and twisted at the same time.

Dodo screamed, but it was no use. Bollie had the gun! He swerved on the dumfounded, thin-faced man and Slug.

Bollie pulled trigger twice. Slug screamed and clapped hands to his middle. The thin-faced man, his gun halfway from an armpit holster, just grinned. But he was dead when he slapped into the floor, a blue-black hole almost in the center of his forehead.

But Dodo was on Bollie. He was mouthing curses, screaming at the top of his voice. He had Bollie around the neck now, was trying to put on pressure. Bollie simply groped for his eyes with long thumbs, gouged them in deep.

"That's the way Roamer Rawson fights when he's cornered!" Bollie panted out joyfully. Bollie's knee came up into Dodo's middle.

Dodo gasped. He was on the floor now. He was in a bad way, and I saw that Bollie had the whip hand. I looked at Slug, yelled and plowed my tummy across that linoleum floor once more. For Slug, face taut in pain, still had enough left to aim his gun full at Bollie!

My fist hit into Slug's wrist just as he fired. There was a shriek, but I wasn't worried. It wasn't Bollie who'd yelled when the bullet smacked into flesh. It was Mr. Dodo Decker!

In a jiffy, Bollie had handcuffs on Slug. There was no need to put them on Dodo and the thin-faced man. Dodo was too badly hurt, and the little man was very dead.

"Oh, why don't the police come in?" I gasped as Bollie held me to him. "They shot . . . yelled for Dodo to put up his hands, then—"

Bollie's grin was soft as he patted my shoulder. "Don't worry about the police, Prunella," he said softly. "I just pushed a button that rings a bell down at the precinct station. I made arrangements with them to come here fast when that bell rings. I couldn't get to it while they were in command awhile ago, and—"

"No police!" I shrilled. "But that shot . . . the voice?"

Bollie laughed. He drew me over to the desk and pointed to the cigarette box. "Hand it to me, Prunella," he said.

I REACHED for it. But it wouldn't move. It was fastened to the top of the desk.

"Look here," Bollie said proudly. "It's something that Roamer Rawson might well be proud of."

We went around the desk and Bollie threw back the lid of that cigarette box. In the lid, hardly noticeable, was a row of tiny buttons! I gasped, looked at Bollie. I knew then why he'd been so quick to serve Dodo and his boys with smokes a while before.

"This first button, Prunella," Bollie said, "is to our dictaphone system hidden in the desk. When I press this botton, everything that's said in the room is recorded on a wax cylinder. It's just like those machines businessmen use in dictating letters.

"This second button stops the recording. Then, by pressing this third button, I can start the machine. But the amplifying system won't begin operating until this fourth button is pressed. I simply pressed the third button, waited until I thought I was right, and then plugged in the fourth and last button. This little gadget here on the side makes the sound loud or soft. I simply opened it as wide as I could, pushed that fourth button at what I thought was the right time, and—"

"But . . . but I still don't get it," I interrupted.

"Easy enough, Prunella," he grinned at me. "It took me a long time to think of it, but we licked 'em just as Roamer Rawson would—by outthinking 'em! But, after all, they defeated themselves. That command of: *'You devils! Put up your hands or I'll shoot hell outta you!'* was what Dodo Decker *told us!*

"That was when he threatened to kill us awhile ago. Naturally, it was recorded on the wax cylinder. It was a ticklish matter deciding when to start the amplifying system, as I had to judge exactly where those words were on the cylinder. But I hit it on the head and Dodo's own words, preceded by the sound of the shot, were what made him

think the cops had arrived and turn and shoot into the wall. *He was shooting at his own voice!*

"Then I tackled him." Bollie's face glowed with excitement. "We've had an adventure, Prunella, that even Roamer Rawson would have relished! I had to do . . . er . . . some boasting a while ago to guild up to the dramatic climax of that mysterious shot and the voice. Just two amateurs in crime, Prunella, but I think we'll get along—we'll get along!"

Bollie stooped, picked up the candid camera from the floor. He looked at it blankly for a moment, then broke out into a mighty laugh.

"The . . . the camera!" he roared. "We . . . I . . . took the pictures and"—he doubled over again—"forgot to take the cap off the lens! There never were any pictures after all!"

The outer door crashed open. The room swarmed with policemen. All I happened to hear was that they had captured the rest of the gang and recovered the money. Bollie and I, it seemed, were due a five-thousand-dollar reward for Dodo and his two lieutenants.

"Mr. Sherlock Holmes!" I told Bollie proudly.

He blushed, was thoughtful for a moment. He said: "Some day, Prunella, after I finish my monumental treatise on the mind, . . . er . . . you may be given a chance to become . . . ah . . . *Missus* Sherlock Holmes!"

Then *I* blushed.

NEXT MONTH:—

THE MINKS AND WEASELS, THE RAMBLING CORPSE, SONG OF DEATH, THUNDER IN PARADISE, and TIN SOLDIER—plus a few more, will make up our next issue. The titles above are complete novelettes by Lester Dent, Robert C. Blackmon, Frank Gruber, Steve Fisher, and Theodore Tinsley, each one featuring your favorite characters.

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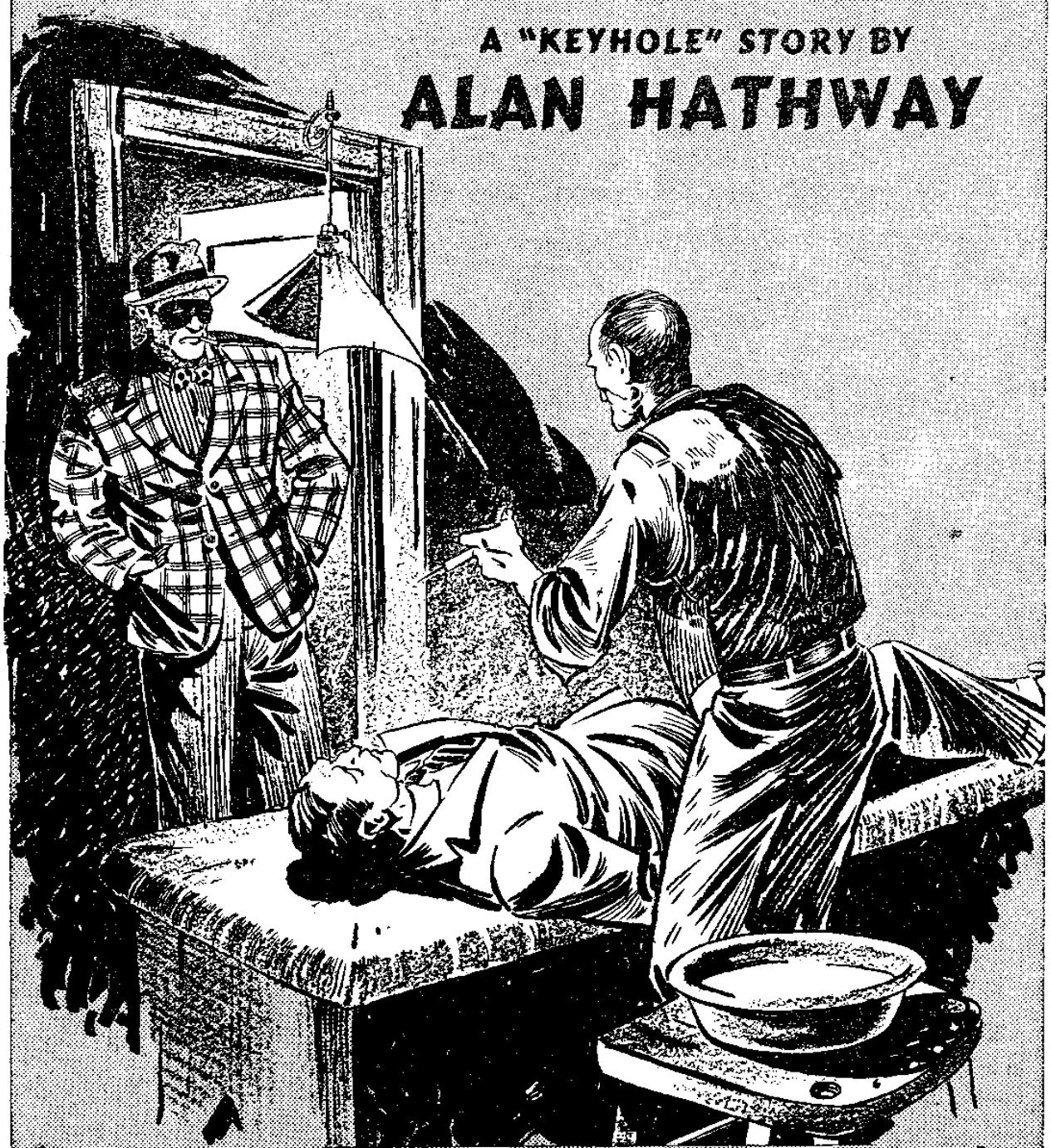
A "KEYHOLE" STORY BY

ALAN HATHWAY



AND WHERE THESE CRIMES WERE TO END WAS COLBY LYMAN'S PROBLEM!

Crime Begins With Me

CHAPTER I.

MASTER OF CRIME.

THE police commissioner should have known that one cop was no protection at all for Dr. Lauren Hinton.

It was worse than no protection—merely an advertisement that invited death for the cop as well.

Lauren Hinton's skinny hand shook as he looked out of the window of his bungalow and office. There was ample reason for the fear that crawled over his thin face.

Perhaps he was regretting that he had given up a simple life as an obstetrician, had become a dermatologist—a plastic surgeon.

Dr. Hinton shuddered, stared vacantly at the sidewalk. That lone cop out there might be taken as proof that he had talked. And to talk, he had been assured, meant death. He hadn't wanted any cop.

Hinton watched a curtained sedan glide slowly up the street. Then he left the window. His glance rested lightly on the telephone at his desk. He smiled slightly. Yes, he had talked. He had spoken to the police commissioner the day before, had told him of the dermo-fat graft that had changed the entire contour of a wanted-criminal's jaw line.

He told of the four times he had been kidnaped, been taken blindfolded to a spot where he was forced to perform criminal plastic surgery.

Then he had told the commissioner he had heard the name of Janus mentioned.

That was when the commissioner had shuddered.

Janus! Who he was no one seemed to know. But murder followed in the wake of that grim name. Janus was the crime master who had the city in a state of jitters. He was a mocking, reckless menace who scrawled his name in messages of derision. The police to him were just a laugh.

Hinton's lips tightened. His wrinkled skin seemed gray. The police might not be able to protect him. But he had also spoken to someone who could. He had phoned The Keyhole, the ruthless mystery man of the *Daily Index* news columns; the man who had done more to stamp out crime in Redwood City than an entire police force.

The Keyhole had given him certain definite instructions.

Dr. Hinton shuddered anew.

Yes, he had talked. And he had a premonition that he was going to have visitors—soon.

THEY came while he was thinking about it. A tommy gun cut loose with a *br-r-r-r-r-tt!*

Hinton began to run. He didn't stop to see that the cop outside had become a corpse. He raced toward the back door of his bungalow. His eyes were wide, dilated. He leaped through the back door, ran straight into the muzzle of a black automatic.

The man behind the gun was masked. Beady black eyes glittered. The thug pushed the gun against Hinton's chest.

"Get your bag, doc," he grated. "And if you been talkin' you better bring your prayer book. You'll need it."

Hinton seemed to go limp. The fire went out of his eyes. Fear was present only in a dull, glazed form. With shoulders drooping, he went into his little operating room, picked up a bag. Then he followed the thug out in back.

"You'll drive your own bus for

a ways, doc," the masked thug grunted. "Then I'll blindfold you and drive the rest."

There wasn't any further conversation. It wasn't necessary. It had happened that way four times before. Each incident was like a dress rehearsal for the next.

The criminals were safe because Hinton never knew the spot to which he was being taken. Nor did he ever recognize the raw faces of the men upon whom he worked. They were apparently out-of-town gunmen brought in for a single job. Then the surgery was performed so their victims could not identify them.

And Hinton was under a constant threat of death.

THERE were two cars in the garage. It happened that Hinton only owned one machine. He mumbled something about his old bus being broken down, squeezed into the newer one. That had been placed there by The Keyhole.

Hinton thought of The Keyhole as he ground down on the starter, slid the car into gear. The columnist had asked Hinton for a list of all his patients. His voice had hardened when he heard the name of Almon Bloodsoe. He had demanded every detail of the double chin Dr. Hinton had removed to salve the vanity of the wealthy criminal attorney. It was common gossip that Bloodsoe stood behind the toughest gangs in the city.

The thug beside the surgeon growled as the sedan rolled down the street.

"How come that cop?" he rasped. "You been talkin'?"

Hinton flinched, squirmed in his seat. He glanced up in the rear view mirror, saw that the thugs' cover-up car was following them.

"The commissioner questioned me," he said evasively. "All plastic surgeons are under suspicion."

The masked man grunted. Hinton reached to the dashboard, absently fumbled with the radio. An indicator light showed that the thing was turned on. But no broadcast came from it.

Hinton tensed, felt his heart pound within him. The only sound from the radio was a peculiar squeal of oscillating tubes. It went on for several minutes. Then the thug jerked erect. His voice came as an angry rasp.

"What the—" he blurted. "Say, I used to be an electrician once. That damned thing's a transmitter!"

He slugged out with his automatic, shattered the dashboard radio. Then he swung the blue steel gun barrel to his left, smashed it against the skull of the physician.

"If the boss hadn't said we got to keep you alive," he snarled, "I'd finish you right now, wise guy."

Hinton groaned as he slumped beneath the wheel, wondered if The Keyhole could pick up the trail.

CHAPTER II.

THE EVAPORATING MAN.

THERE were three men in the office of the Redwood City *Index*. Two of them glared at each other.

The third man just looked nervous. He was Renwick Overton, the publisher.

Michael O'Flaherty started the talking. Mike was the police commissioner. His face was purple with rage. Cords stuck out on his neck like cables wrapped in red flannel.

"Janus!" Mike ripped. It was like an oath. *"Janus, Crime Begins With Me!"*

Mike O'Flaherty snorted. Those

five words burned in his brain like a white-hot branding iron. They had been the sneering signature on eight jolting notes mailed to the commissioner.

Four of the notes followed murders. Three came after brutal kidnapings in which the victims had all been slain. The last one had been the harsh triumph of the master crook after a bank holdup. Each crime had shown a profit.

And today, Mike had received an anonymous tip that Janus was about to strike again. The tipster had laughed, then hung up. He might have been the blatant Janus.

Mike leaned closer to the other man in the room. He was a big man, heavier even than O'Flaherty. In the dim light of the office he looked soft.

"Come clean, Jenkins!" Mike roared suddenly. "Come clean with me, or I'll lock you up."

Harold Jenkins' eyes were cold, without expression. He owned the Redwood City *Index*. Until a week before, none of his employees had ever seen him. He had been forced to put in an appearance. The spot had become too hot for the nervous Overton.

Jenkins spoke in a soft voice. He sounded as if the problem were quite remote, something that did not concern him.

"Janus," he sighed, "was an old Roman deity. The god of all beginnings, I believe. Is that what you want to know?"

Michael O'Flaherty nearly burst a blood vessel. His voice rose to a bellow of rage. It showed that Mike was as baffled as he was enraged.

"No, dammit," he shouted. "I mean there are only two men in the city who know enough to be this Janus guy. One of them is Almon Bloodsoe, the criminal lawyer."

Harold Jenkins' heavy black eyebrows rose slightly. "So-o-o," he began.

"So I don't think it's him," Mike snapped. "I've been watching Bloodsoe. I think this head guy of crime is your columnist, The Keyhole! And by Harry, I'm—"

Mike O'Flaherty spluttered off into silence. Harold Jenkins said nothing for a moment. He knew several things about Almon Bloodsoe. He also knew a few about Mike O'Flaherty.

He knew that Bloodsoe had a niece who was beautiful. And he knew Mike was in love with Sara Bloodsoe. Jenkins didn't suspect Mike of dishonesty. But it was perhaps only natural that he give the uncle of the girl the benefit of some doubts.

"I . . . I been checkin'," Mike said lamely. "Every stoolie I got says Bloodsoe ain't this Janus guy. Why, Bull Muldoon wouldn't stand for—"

The phone shrilled.

Harold Jenkins' pudgy hand drifted slowly toward the handset. If he had any thought that fresh trouble was on the way, it did not show in his frosty eyes. Jenkins was thinking of Bull Muldoon, the political power who stood back of Bloodsoe. Their relationship had always seemed strange to Jenkins.

The two men stood side by side in most things—probably in the many crimes everyone felt sure they had been behind. But there was something of fear, of distrust, in their attitude toward each other.

There was only one crime Muldoon would not stand for. That was gossip of the underworld. Bull Muldoon's own child had been kidnaped many years before. He had never got her back. Bull hated kidnapers.

MIKE O'FLAHERTY grunted, tore out of the office. The murder needed his immediate attention.

Harold Jenkins came suddenly to life. He leaped from his chair, moved toward the office door with an effortlessness that belied his weight.

"Take over, Renwick," he rapped. "Until I tell you to the contrary, follow the usual orders with The Keyhole."

Jenkins smiled as he strode out of the door. The usual orders were that The Keyhole's frequently damning copy must never be changed a comma. None of the staff knew who The Keyhole was. They knew only that he was a phantom scribe who had brought bombings upon the building, threats to the owners and terror to the underworld.

Jenkins moved with a strange haste. He padded softly to a turn in the corridor near the rear of the building. The hallway made a double turn. It was like the middle bar of the letter Z. It afforded a great deal of privacy.

More, it suddenly seemed, than Jenkins wanted. He walked smack into the muzzle of an ugly automatic. He stopped, faint surprise showing in his frosty eyes. Slowly, he raised his hands.

The hand behind the gun was steady. It was a finely molded hand; as finely molded as the girl who owned it. Dark eyes flashed at Jenkins. They showed a grim determination—and terror.

"You've got to stop The Keyhole," Sara Bloodsoe gasped without preliminary. "He knows much. But there is more involved than he realizes!"

The girl's eyes burned fiercely. Jenkins noticed that she was beautiful; enough so to turn the head of any police commissioner. Her obvious desperation, her terror, enhanced the vitality of her charm. But her lips tightened as she talked

"If The Keyhole doesn't stop, I . . . I'll kill him!"

Sara Bloodsoe's eyes pleaded with Jenkins. They seemed to say that she did not really want to kill; that her hand was being forced by some power greater than her will. Harold Jenkins wondered.

Footsteps sounded suddenly behind him. The girl's mouth formed a startled "O." A low moan escaped her lips. Like a frightened rabbit, she turned and raced down the corridor.

Harold Jenkins stood motionless for a moment. A sub-editor, copy proofs in his hands, hurried past him in the corridor. Jenkins was trying to piece sections of a puzzle together in his mind; a puzzle that grew more incomprehensible as he picked up new pieces.

In a moment the short section of corridor was again empty except for the *Index* owner. Jenkins' pudgy hand touched a flat surface of the wall. A panel slid back with a snap, replaced itself automatically as the big man drifted through the opening.

Soft lights illuminated a large office inside the door. The furniture consisted of a desk, a laboratory bench and a make-up table. But something else made Jenkins leap to the other wall. A queer buzzing sound emanated from a set of dialed panels. A small, motor-controlled loop aërial surmounted the panel.

Jenkins raced to the control panel. The buzzing sound was insistent. It was a sound that told him The Keyhole might have to save a life within a too-short space of time. The big man adjusted several knobs. As he

He had been suspected of murder. But never of kidnaping.

And Janus had staged three kidnapings—brutal affairs in which the victims had been slain. Even the contact men who collected the ransom cash had been murdered by their master to make them perfect jobs.

Harold Jenkins answered the phone. His grayish eyes narrowed under black, jutting brows. The voice that came to him was breathless, excited. Jenkins' mouth tightened.

"Hold it," he snapped. "Tell it to the commissioner."

O'Flaherty grabbed the phone. His jaws worked feverishly. The voice told him that Janus had struck again. Herbert Weinman, the city treasurer, had been murdered. He had been carrying fifty thousand dollars in city funds for a payroll. The holdup man had been plainly seen, could be identified.

Presumably, no one except Weinman's own office force knew when he was to leave with the cash. But Jenkins knew that Almon Bloodsoe was Weinman's personal attorney!

O'Flaherty seemed to droop as he put down the phone. Jenkins spoke softly to him.

"Get on the job, Mike," he said. "I'll make a deal. If this thing isn't broken in forty-eight hours, I'll deliver The Keyhole to you!"

The dark-eyed girl showed determination—and terror.

scrutinized them, his hands moved quickly to his head and face. They brushed dark shading from his eyebrows, from his hair. Lines of age erased from his features.

The big man's face became placid, the frosty eyes pale and innocent. He seemed a blond, easygoing fat man. Mike O'Flaherty would have recognized him as a man he trusted. Jenkins became Colby Lyman, crack linotype operator and make-up printer. The staff knew Colby Lyman, knew that he held a deputy sheriff's badge, that he had an inordinate interest in crime.

But no one knew that he was also The Keyhole!

CHAPTER III.

KILLERS' FIELD DAY.

COLBY LYMAN'S frosty eyes studied the dials on his advanced direction finder. It wasn't working now. It had stopped when the thug smashed the radio in the car The Keyhole had loaned to Dr. Lauren Hinton. The Keyhole wondered how the thug had discovered the device. Properly operated, it should not have been noticeable.

The ponderous columnist ripped a sheet of paper from under a stylus pencil on the panel. It resembled the recording of a seismograph. A quick study of it told him exactly where the car had been when the transmitter was destroyed. The sensitive loop had followed every turn taken by the car. He checked the findings on a calibrated map of the city.

Then The Key[illegible]raced from the room. As he went out, he picked up a firstful of mail that had dropped through the chute from the editorial rooms above.

The Keyhole's car was a big, bullet-proof sedan. The speedometer hovered around the eighty mark as the columnist tore through the sparsely settled sections in the northwest part of the city. He hit a long straight-away between miles of vacant lots.

There, he guided the speeding car with one thick-fingered hand and glanced at his mail. Suddenly, he slowed. One piece was interesting. The missive was unsigned.

But it was documentary proof that Almon Bloodsoe was the brain behind a kidnaping two weeks before! It was evidence that Bloodsoe had imported the actual kidnaper from Chicago.

And that job had been one that the sneering notes signed *Janus, Crime Begins With Me,* had bragged about. The imported killer had been found slain after he had collected the ransom cash, his lips sealed so that he could not talk about his master. The master criminal had first given his hireling false security by forcing Dr. Lauren Hinton to change his features by surgery. He had been identified by fingerprints.

The Keyhole speeded up again. His frosty eyes were sharp in concentration. Perhaps Dr. Hinton was not in immediate danger. If the master crook planned to kill his hirelings anyway, there was nothing for the kidnaped surgeon to identify. Janus covered his tracks to perfection.

Or did he?

Colby whipped the big car to an abrupt halt on a deserted street in an outlying factory district. The factories were small ones, owned by little firms who could not pay the rents demanded closer to the center of the city.

This was the spot where the direction finder had last located the car

bearing Dr. Hinton. The Keyhole got out, whipped a flashlight from his pocket. Finally he found the signs he sought.

They were drops of bright yellow oil. The car he had loaned to the surgeon had a special oversized crank case. When the motor started, a tiny plug dropped out. The Keyhole could still follow the trail of the killers.

Colby had to drive more slowly now. He had to concentrate his vision on those spaced drops of oddly-colored oil. It kept his mind on the road ahead.

He tried, as he drove, to piece his latest bit of information into the screwy puzzle. There was one thing that worried him. He knew that the slain kidnaper had once worked for Bull Muldoon. He wondered if Muldoon and Bloodsoe were banded together, if the two of them were the mysterious Janus.

The Keyhole was soon to find other evidence that would make him wonder about that suspicion. Colby had been sure more information would come to him that night; had thought it might even now be waiting for him. But first, he had to extricate Dr. Hinton from the predicament he was in.

Suddenly he saw the car he had loaned to the surgeon. He whipped his sedan to a silent stop, stepped quietly from his own machine. His .45s were in his hands. The Keyhole's mouth was a thin, straight line. He had no idea how many thugs might be waiting.

The borrowed sedan was pulled up beside a shabby, two-story building. It had once been a dwelling. Now it looked like little more than wreckage. Slowly, The Keyhole moved toward the place.

The shot that blasted out did not come from the shabby building. It roared into the night from behind The Keyhole! The big man staggered. Blood ran down his face. He knew the slug had merely creased his skull. But the crease was deep. Colby fought for consciousness. But his knees sagged slowly. He lost that battle.

THE room in which The Keyhole awoke was dingy. Three straight-backed chairs and an ancient kitchen table comprised the only furniture. Heat came from a cast-iron stove. Its fire pot glowed redly. Four masked thugs surrounded him. Guns were in their hands. The Keyhole was tightly bound.

Through an open door he saw another room. It was cleaner, better lighted. A padded bench served as an operating table. On it lay a man. Colby Lyman recognized those features from his own private file of crime.

Weasel Monterro was a torpedo from Chicago. His description tallied with that of the killer who had slain Herbert Weinman, the city treasurer, less than two hours before. Monterro was a rat-faced thug who could not be mistaken in a crowd. Flat, receding forehead surmounted a twisted nose that had been smashed in by some opponent's fist.

One thug stood in the doorway. The mask hid his nose and eyes. But his lips twisted cruelly.

"Go ahead, doc," he growled. "Get it over with. No one's goin' to bother you. But if you make a move to get away, I'll drill you."

The Keyhole noticed two things. One was that the windows of the improvised operating room were stoutly barred. The other was the voice of the thug who spoke. Colby knew the voice. It belonged to a

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man known to work for Almon Bloodsoe; a runner and investigator who was a right-arm to the crooked criminal lawyer. But the thug also had worked for Bull Muldoon!

"We'll let the doc live this time, wise guy," he rasped. "He'll have another job to do. He gets his after the next job he does. But you go out now, punk. On a one-way ticket."

Colby Lyman sighed. The thug did not realize he was The Keyhole. Otherwise he would have gloated over the capture. Colby worked methodically at his bonds. His frosty eyes missed no detail of the rooms as he did.

Hinton worked smoothly. The Keyhole gathered from mumbled remarks of the thugs that the doctor worked better in a room by himself. Once nervousness had made his hand slip. A surgical change of features had almost been ruined. Colby also gathered from their remarks that they would prefer to kll the doctor here. They considered him too dangerous to be allowed to live. But the boss had given orders to keep him alive for other jobs.

Hinton talked to himself as he worked. He seemed extremely nervous. Sometimes his voice dropped so low The Keyhole could not hear it. But he got enough to recognize the operation.

Cartilaginous graft was inserted beneath the receding brow. Weasel Monterro would emerge with the bulging brow of a scholar. Rib cartilage inserted in the bridge of the damaged nose completed the change in his appearance. If Weasel added lifts to his shoes, changed his gait a bit, the smartest detective would be fooled.

A car purred up outside, stopped. The thugs tensed. One peered from the edge of a drawn window shade. Then he grunted, opened the door. Another crook came in, his face also masked. He strode to the leader The Keyhole had recognized. They whispered briefly together. The Keyhole did not get all of it.

But he got enough to know there had been a change in plans. He didn't realize then that this change in plans would provide the key to the queerest crime The Keyhole had ever encountered!

THE other thugs in the room were watching the newcomer. They were straining their ears, trying to catch part of the instructions they seemed to know came from their leader. It took their scrutiny from the recumbent figure of The Keyhole.

Colby Lyman tensed once. The bonds at his wrists burst. The Keyhole shot out a fist. Something hurtled toward the red-hot stove. There was a booming flash in the room that sounded like a TNT explosion. The whole place filled suddenly with smoke.

Thugs jerked erect, triggered their guns in their excitement. Colby Lyman pounded across the room, through the door to the operating chamber. He slammed the door behind him, jammed a chair up under the knob. What he had thrown at the stove was merely a package of old-style flashgun powder. But it had served its purpose.

The Keyhole plunged past Dr. Hinton. He dived straight toward one barred window. Then he leaped, twisting as he did. One beefy shoulder struck the bars at the window. Colby Lyman's three hundred odd pounds slammed against them.

The bars did not give. But the rotten wood of the window sill splintered. The screws that held the bars

ripped from their moorings. Mighty hands gripped the bars then and twisted. The window made a path of escape.

"Out!" The Keyhole barked. "They'll be upon us in a moment."

Dr. Hinton scrambled through the opening. Thugs plunged against the door held only by the chair against the knob. The Keyhole helped the surgeon through. Then he squeezed his own ponderous bulk through the hole. Thugs poured from the front of the building. Then the men inside shattered the door, rushed across the operating room.

The Keyhole ripped out an emergency automatic strapped under one trousers leg. He barked instructions for Hinton to get clear. Then he turned to face the maddened killers.

The Keyhole had only eight slugs in his automatic. The thugs had many more. But The Keyhole did not miss. Four killers fell to the ground in screaming agony before he saw the tommy gun. He did not stay to contest that weapon. The Keyhole left, to learn more of Janus, the master of Redwood City's crime wave.

CHAPTER IV.

MURDER BOOMERANGS.

COLBY LYMAN faded into the night. Hinton had taken The Keyhole's sedan at Colby's orders. Colby was on foot. He ran with a tireless effort that seemed impossible for a man of his tremendous girth. He took a route across weed-tangled vacant lots that could not be traversed by automobile. And the thugs could not catch him if they also were on foot.

The Keyhole did not head back toward the office. He found a suburban center with a cigar store and a taxi stand. He leaped into a waiting cab, gave sharp, terse orders. The cab roared toward the city, into one of the finer residential districts.

Near one great house surrounded by half a dozen acres of manicured lawn and shrubbery, The Keyhole paid off his cab. Silently, he padded across the velvety grass. The house was huge, ornate. It was very nearly a mansion. Few lights were on. But on the first floor, apparently in the main living room, lights glowed brightly. The Keyhole crept to a window, looked inside.

He saw a tableau that did not surprise him. One of the three persons there was beautiful Sara Bloodsoe. One man was arguing with her, apparently pleading. The Keyhole could not hear his words nor catch the movement of his lips. At first, the attitude of Bull Muldoon mystified him. Then, slowly, he thought a light began to dawn.

The other man was Almon Bloodsoe, uncle of the pretty girl. He was a tall, spare man with a sharp, hooked nose. His eyes were black, like buttons. But fear lurked in those eyes. His thin lips were curved in a sardonic grin that belied the expression of the eyes.

The Keyhole noticed several sheets of paper on the table between the three. One of them was a copy of the *Index*.

Bull Muldoon seemed impatient. Bull was built like a barrel. His arms were those of a blacksmith. Indeed, before Bull Muldoon had muscled his way up the ladder of crooked politics, he had been a blacksmith.

Muldoon kept on talking. Hate dripped from his thick lips as words ripped out. He was speaking low. Not a word came to The Keyhole's ears.

Sara Bloodsoe looked straight at him. Her face held a queer determination. Her chin was high. She shook her head. Her voice was clear, loud.

"No," she said flatly. "I will not do it. Not even if you insist, Bull Muldoon."

The Keyhole could see she was biting her lips, trying to stifle some strong emotion.

Muldoon suddenly spat out an oath. He jammed a hat on his head and strode wrathfully toward the door. He slammed it, strode to his car parked outside. The gears screamed as he drove away.

THE KEYHOLE decided then that he would act. He found a round stone in the driveway, stood back from the house. His wrist came down like a skillful baseball pitcher. Glass crashed in a window at the front of the building.

The two figures in the room turned, startled. They rushed toward the source of the noise. Silently, The Keyhole raised the window. He tore across the floor to the table in the center of the room, scanned the papers that he saw there. One of them he wanted.

He seized it.

Then he found that Almon Bloodsoe was well guarded. Footsteps pounded back from the front of the house. They did not belong to Bloodsoe and the girl. Ugly-faced thugs crowded in. The Keyhole laughed. He had no further business here. Like a flash, he darted to one wall, and quickly pulled a light switch.

Red stabs of flame tongued out in the darkness. Lead plowed into plaster walls. But The Keyhole was moving. He dived through the window, rolled as he struck the ground. In another instant he was a vague shape moving through the shrubbery. In another half a dozen seconds he had found another cab. Then he read the note he had picked up from the table. It was addressed to Bloodsoe. It read:

> You'll give, you rat. You'll give all you have. I know all your secrets. You will hear from me again.

The note was unsigned.

The Keyhole's gray eyes hardened. There was only one man who should know all the secrets of Almon Bloodsoe. That was Bull Muldoon. Colby Lyman shook his head and wondered. He also knew there was a girl who might know the secrets of the racket lawyer. Sara Bloodsoe, the girl loved by Mike O'Flaherty, commissioner of police. She might know them. The Keyhole shook his head. There was something that didn't add up as he thought it should. He had a feeling that something he had seen should tell him a little more than his brain would give him.

The Keyhole directed the taxi back to the office of the *Index*. He had expected a showdown there before he left. He tensed now, hoped he would not be disappointed upon his return.

An elevator took printer Colby Lyman to the fifth floor of the building. He padded softly down the corridor, toward that short space that led to the secret door of The Keyhole's sanctum. A hurried glance told him the corridor was empty. He hastened as he drifted through the sliding panel.

But he did not see a small man slink furtively around the corner of the corridor as the door slid shut.

"A guy went in there," a coarse voice whispered. "It must've been The Keyhole."

COLBY LYMAN strode across the room, past the mail chute. There was more mail there now. Idly, he thumbed through it, selected one grimy envelope. His mouth went grim as he slit it open, read the typewritten inclosure. He had expected this. It was a sneering boast of the successful murder and robbery of Herbert Weinman. It was signed:

"Janus, Crime Begins With Me."

The Keyhole grunted, turned to a spread-open copy of the latest edition of the *Index*. It was the same edition that had been opened in the living room of Almon Bloodsoe. It was turned to The Keyhole column. Colby had expected results from that.

"Janus was an ancient Roman deity," the column stated. "Among other things he was a god of all beginnings. Watch this column for the rise and fall of the Roman Janus in crime's beginnings. The bigshot's secret has been unmasked and the political repercussions may be terrific. From your correspondent on the crime front.

"The Keyhole."

Colby Lyman smiled grimly. He had been guessing when he wrote that. But he had wanted it to make other people do some guessing, too. Suddenly he knew it had.

A faint shadow showed on the ceiling above The Keyhole. A triple arrangement of mirrors showed him the hallway outside. There were six porters there, carelessly sweeping with their brooms.

The Keyhole knew no porters were on duty in the *Index* Building at this hour. The big man smiled grimly, pulled a small mask from his

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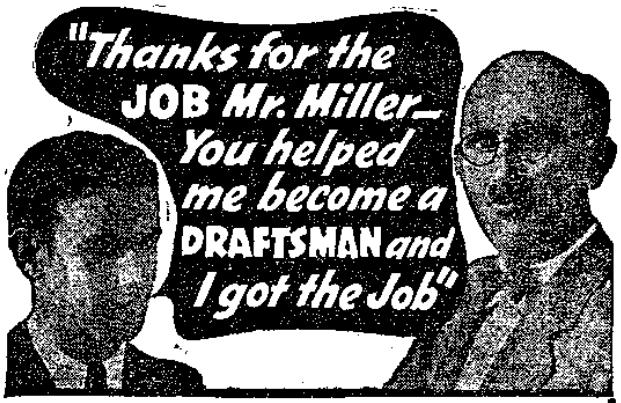

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pocket. He intended to face these foes. But he could not afford to expose the identity of Colby Lyman. The Keyhole needed the fat printer who prodded into other people's business.

Two .45 automatics slapped into The Keyhole's fat-appearing hands. A tight grin was on his face. In the mirror above him he saw the porters turn, look questioningly at one who seemed their leader. That "porter" was built like a barrel. His arms bulged like a blacksmith's.

The man was Bull Muldoon.

Looking in the mirror, The Keyhole saw the other five porters drop their bags. Three of them cradled ugly tommy guns. Muldoon ripped orders from his wide, thick-lipped mouth. The men spread out, aimed at the point in the wall where The Keyhole had entered his sanctum.

The Keyhole tensed, backed from the line of fire. He knew the tommy guns could cut through the wall, could blast the lock from that hidden door. But the columnist wanted them to come through the door. He wanted to talk to Bull Muldoon. He thought he could do it safely.

But surprise was in store for The Keyhole. He heard the tommy guns blast their way through the wall. But the signal that seemed to start them came first. It was a low whistle that came from behind Colby.

THE fat printer whirled. Then his hands went up. He was covered by two guns as deadly as his own. He knew the man. No other creature could have crept in behind him, through bars that ran across his window.

Spider Mink was both a human fly and a professional escape artist. He had done time both on the stage and in a variety of prisons. Now he worked for Bull Muldoon. Spider Mink's eyes were dilated wildly. He

was hopped up to the ears. His white fingers tightened on the triggers of his automatics. The Keyhole might shoot it out. But, wounded, he would never get away from Bull Muldoon and his gangsters.

The door from the corridor fell with a crash. The gunmen crowded in. Bull Muldoon thrust himself in front of them. His bulldog jaw was shoved out. His little blue eyes glittered wildly. Something more powerful than rage was driving Bull Muldoon. He was a man who usually covered his tracks with skill and care.

No one could depend on successfully getting away with what Bull was doing now. That became immediately apparent. His voice was a low rasp of hate.

"I think you're the guy who knows too much," he spat at the masked fat man before him. "Either that or Bloodsoe's faking extortion on himself. So, rat, I'm going to kill you both!"

Muldoon advanced slowly, a heavy automatic aimed at The Keyhole's midriff. Then he said an amazing thing.

"I'm going to take the rap for this alone," he snarled. "I'll say you were shaking me down and drew a rod."

His voice wheezed with emotion. A grin of triumph crept over his heavy face.

"I pulled the Statewide Bank holdup," he sneered. "But nobody'll ever prove that one. After I get Bloodsoe, they won't prove anything else on me except maybe bumping you. I may get hooked for this, punk. But I'm goin' to have a swell time doin' it."

Muldoon's gun roared three times. Flame leaped from it, slammed lead into the midriff of The Keyhole. The fat columnist staggered, fell. His heavy body struck the floor, rolled slightly. It knocked against an upright that seemed to hold up the radio direction finder panel.

An explosion boomed into the room. Tear gas *whooshed* from compressor jets in the wall. At the same instant, the floor dropped from under Bull Muldoon and his gangsters. There was nothing but a yawning hole where the floor had been before.

Tommy guns roared, triggered by pure reflex action. Bull Muldoon cursed. Then he screamed in pain. The Keyhole hung to the narrow shelf on which he lay. He looked down into the concrete pit that trapped the gangsters. Bull had fallen in front of one of the spewing tommy guns.

Whatever other crime he may have planned would be done by other hands. Bull Muldoon was finished.

CHAPTER V.

JANUS UNMASKED.

THE KEYHOLE pressed a hidden button. A fan turned on, sucked away the tear gas. At the same instant, the floor swung back in place. Colby struggled to his feet. His stomach was sore from the impact of the .45 slugs against the bullet-proof vest he wore. But his mind was not on that soreness. It was on the many things Muldoon had told him. They were more, he believed, than Muldoon had realized.

He suddenly knew one thing of great importance. The various jobs claimed by Janus had *not* been committed by the same person! Muldoon had admitted the Statewide Bank holdup. That was one that

Janus had bragged about under his strange signature. But The Keyhole knew Bull had not touched the kidnap murders.

And he was sure now that the peculiar attitude of Bull Muldoon about the snatch racket was one key to the whole thing he sought—the one thing that would solve it!

But he wondered if Bloodsoe had muscled in on Muldoon's affairs; had tried to throw the blame for everything on the political boss to clear his own dirty skirts. He wondered if Bloodsoe had written that extortion threat to himself.

In that instant, The Keyhole received an unexpected answer to those questions that were still hidden from him. They were answers that he later thought he should have known before.

A light flashed on one wall of the sanctum. It announced the arrival of a visitor in the usual manner in which informants reached The Keyhole. Colby flicked off the lights in the inner room. He looked through an argus mirror at another, larger chamber.

The other room was like a mirror maze in an amusement park. Only more so. The visitor, once inside, could be sure of no direction except the one from which he had come. He saw two dozen images of himself.

The visitor was a man whom Colby Lyman had seen before that night. It was Weasel Monterro, the Weinman killer whose features had been changed in the shack on the outskirts of the city. Blood dropped from an ugly hole in the killer's chest. The Keyhole knew he saw a dying man. He darted through a secret panel into the room of mirrors.

Weasel Monterro's breath came in a racking sob. His words were faint, scarcely distinguishable.

"The boss changed orders," he gasped. "First I was to take the dough to him. That was changed. Then he had me waylaid, gunned me out—" Weasel groaned, then wheezed out his final words. "Double cross," he wheezed. "You gotta get the rat—"

At that moment, Weasel died.

THE KEYHOLE'S eyes sparkled strangely as he raced back into his sanctum. He knew he was going to have to move fast now. There were two lives he might save. And one of them, he felt sure, was well worth saving.

He ripped his phone from the cradle, called police headquarters. Tersely, he identified himself to Mike O'Flaherty as Colby Lyman. Mike knew Colby, thought he was an all-right guy.

Colby outlined as much of the situation as he thought the commissioner should know. Then he made some pointed suggestions.

In another instant, The Keyhole was out of his sanctum, racing down the corridor. He hurled his huge bulk down the emergency stairs, not bothering to wait for the slow elevator. He was sure there was little time to lose.

Colby jumped into a circulation mat car used to take mats to the suburban pressroom. He roared down the street and toward the home of Almon Bloodsoe. The murder of Weasel Monterro, after that change in plans, told The Keyhole the last link of the chain he had been trying to forge.

It told him that murder was about to rear its head in the palatial dwelling of Almon Bloodsoe.

The mat car screamed to a stop

before the spacious grounds of the criminal lawyer's home. Colby leaped out and raced across the grass. He stumbled over three silent bodies. They were thugs in the employ of the racket lawyer. He recognized them as men he had seen in the shack where Dr. Hinton had been forced to operate.

Colby grunted, raced on toward the window of the living room. What he saw convinced him that his answers were the right ones. Only one figure was in the room. It was hunched over a wall safe in one corner. Suddenly the man sprang back. His face was masked. His figure was almost indistinguishable in the dim light of the room.

The masked one hurled a rug over the wall safe. Then he flattened himself on the floor.

Boom!

Smoke *whooshed* out as nitroglycerin blasted the safe door across the room. The matted rug checked its flight. Two things happened quickly then. The masked man scooped up a bundle from the safe. And Colby Lyman hurtled through the window.

He landed on the floor with a thud. The masked figure whirled. A snarl escaped from tight-drawn lips. Flame blazed from a short-barreled automatic. The man could shoot. Hot lead tugged through The Keyhole's shoulder, almost spun him around. The masked figure raced wildly across the room toward the door at the front of the building.

The Keyhole recovered his balance, slammed lead at the fleeing figure with his .45. The slug struck the wrist of the fugitive. The bundle fell from his hands. In that instant, sirens began to scream out in front. The masked one rasped an oath, hesitated for a fraction of a second. Then the fugitive ignored the bundle, concentrated on his escape.

The Keyhole also ignored the bundle. He knew that it was the fifty thousand dollars stolen from the murdered Herbert Weinman! He knew that Janus had failed in getting that when he waylaid Weasel Monterro. And he knew why Janus had thought Weasel still was scheduled to carry the money to his boss!

COLBY LYMAN bent quickly over the wall safe. He was sure there was something else there more important to several persons than the fifty thousand dollars. His big hands pawed hurriedly over sheafs of papers, evidence of a dozen crimes perpetrated by Almon Bloodsoe. There was evidence there of the three murderous kidnapings in the recent crime wave. Then he found what he sought. With a grunt of satisfaction, Colby Lyman turned from the safe, examined closely the documents he held.

One was proof, indisputable evidence that Bull Muldoon had murdered many years before, had murdered to gain his first step up the ladder of crooked politics! It explained the hold Bloodsoe had always held over the ruthless political boss.

But there was other proof of an even more startling revelation. It explained the heated conversation of Muldoon earlier in the night. The document showed indisputably that Sara Bloodsoe was the kidnaped daughter of Bull Muldoon! With it was a letter from the crooked leader.

"Treat her right and I'll go along," it said. "But if you don't, a murder

rap won't stop me from getting you."

The Keyhole was sure that Muldoon had believed earlier that night that exposure was upon him. He felt certain that Bull had been urging his daughter to clear herself of the guilty knowledge that he was a murderer. Sara was the one soft spot in the tough armor of Bull Muldoon.

Then Bull had concluded that two murders might take the evidence of that guilty knowledge with them.

Colby knew then that Janus had been ready to use that information he had somehow gained, anyway. And there was one more thing that Colby knew—Bull had thought The Keyhole was in on that projected exposé!

Staccato shots from outside interrupted The Keyhole's thoughts. The columnist pocketed the evidence he had found, pounded to the door. In the hallway, he stumbled over another body. It was that of Almon Bloodsoe. The racket lawyer was very dead. Swiftly, The Keyhole stooped over him, frisked his pockets. He took Bloodsoe's key ring. If he had duplicate evidence in a safety-deposit box, The Keyhole meant to get it.

Then he raced outside. The foghorn voice of Mike O'Flaherty bellowed through the night. His words were sulphuric.

"Get that guy," Mike roared. "But don't dare touch the girl!"

Another voice cut in. It was a nasal, sneering tone. It held self-confidence. The man seemed to know the esteem in which the police commissioner held Sara Bloodsoe.

"You can't touch me without the girl," the voice jeered. "Come one foot closer and I'll put a bullet in her spine."

THE voice came from the rear of the house. The Keyhole raced toward it, then halted. He saw the masked figure backing slowly toward a parked sedan. The motor of the car was already running. Before him the masked one held Sara Bloodsoe. He had a gun jammed into her back.

Colby Lyman tensed. His eyes went hard with a calculating steadiness.

"Hold it, Janus," he grated. "I know who you are, The Keyhole told me. With me alive, you cannot be safe."

The Keyhole slowly raised his gun. He knew that if the master crook got away the girl would have to die. She must by this time suspect the identity of the criminal. The Keyhole had to gamble. He repeated his flat warning.

Janus cursed. He whipped up the gun that had been pressed to the spine of the girl. To shoot at Colby he had to expose himself just a little. The Keyhole had to chance it then. A less expert shot might have killed Sara Bloodsoe through sheer nervousness.

Two guns blasted simultaneously. The Keyhole jerked. Lead tore again through his shoulder. His knees wabbled slightly. Loss of blood was beginning to weaken him.

But Janus stumbled. He was of smaller stature. The .45 slug slammed him halfway around. It knocked him from the protecting shield of Sara Bloodsoe.

Police guns did the rest. They filled the masked crime master with enough lead to make an anchor. Janus fell with a groan. He was through, forever.

Colby Lyman walked shakily over to the corpse. He ripped the mask from the face. Dr. Lauren Hinton

was pale in death. A sneer still twisted his wrinkled lips.

THE Keyhole laughed, looked into the car. He pulled out the plastic surgeon's bag, examined its contents. When he turned, he held up one bottle. Cops around him gaped, demanded an explanation.

"Scopolamine." Colby grunted. "Otherwise known as the truth-serum drug. Hinton used it as an anesthetic. He got his first idea when he operated on Bloodsoe. Bloodsoe talked. Hinton learned every detail of his projected crimes. He learned all of Bloodsoe's past. Then he hijacked the profits. The gangs were interchangeable with Bull Muldoon's gorillas. When Hinton performed the jobs he was forced to do, he managed to be in a room by himself. He learned plenty from the thugs under his anesthetic."

One of the cops scratched his head.

"Well, I'll be damned," he muttered. "Who could've figured that one out?"

Colby scowled.

"We all should have tumbled," he rapped. "Hinton used to be an obstetrician. That's where the use of scopolamine was first discovered as a truth serum. It was known as twilight sleep."

The Keyhole turned then. The

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sight he saw made him grin slightly. Sara Bloodsoe was in the arms of Mike O'Flaherty. Mike was arguing softly with her. She shook her head.

"Your career is more important," she muttered.

Colby ignored the tableau for a moment.

"Look, Mike," he said. "This guy Janus wrote a lot of notes to throw blame toward Bloodsoe and Muldoon. Then he came to the cops. He knew a plastic surgeon might be found out. He wanted to seem on the right side of the law. But he missed one thing, Mike. It gave me something of a tip-off when I tumbled."

Mike O'Flaherty grunted. He was still looking at Sara.

"What?" he asked vaguely.

"Janus, himself," Colby explained. "Janus is the Roman god of all beginnings. But he's also something else. He's the two-faced god. The deity known for deception."

Sara Bloodsoe whirled at the word. Her eyes flashed defiance.

"That's just it, Mike. I won't let you use deception for me. My father was—"

Colby caught it then. He yelped at her, made her stop.

"Shut up, you beautiful fool," he rapped. "What about your father?"

The two looked queerly at the fat printer who had the proofs that could cloud forever the memories of Bull Muldoon, Dr. Hinton and Almon Bloodsoe. But Colby Lyman was carefully tearing several sheets of paper to tiny bits—evidence that the girl the police commissioner would marry was the daughter of a murderer.

Colby scattered the tiny pieces into the night wind.

"So what?" he asked mildly. "Bull is dead."

"Drunken Driver" Tests

"DRUNKEN driving" is becoming more and more of a problem. It's a serious—a very serious—proposition. As the production of cars has increased, naturally accidents have increased. It's a life-or-death problem. And it is a criminal problem, too.

A man has a few "shots" of liquor. He may be highly moral, generous, a taxpayer, a worth-while citizen, a good fellow; in fact, his very good-fellowship may be back of the drinks he imbibed. Then he climbs into his car. And, if he takes the wheel, a Jekyll-Hyde metamorphosis takes place; he turns from a good fellow into a potential killer. If he hits and kills someone, the victim is just as dead as a vicious murderer could have made him.

Now, what constitutes drunken driving? It's not necessarily the amount of liquor imbibed. Mr. X might toss off a pint, and feel only a gentle glow. Mr. Y might take only two or three snifters and be really intoxicated. So the authorities have to arrive at a norm. And they have various methods for determining definitely whether a driver is or is not intoxicated.

That's where the police come in.

One method is by general observations by officers and witnesses made at the scene of accident or at the police station. These witnesses appear in court and testify by giving their opinion as to whether the accused was under the influence of liquor. Many city and State departments still rely upon this general observation method. But there is a definite trend toward the use of scientific tests.

In certain cases police officers supplement a written report of general observations by noting specific actions such as ability to walk, ability to stand, speech, odor of breath, tremor of hands, condition of hair, condition of eyes, color of face, marks or injuries, and unusual acts. The mere odor of alcohol on the breath is not necessarily incriminating. The driver might have taken one drink. But certainly it's a cause for suspicion. Buttressed by other signs, it could result in a conviction.

Specific questions are asked, and general co-ordination is measured by observing the ability to perform simple tests. Generally the answers to questions are results of observation, and tests are recorded on a special examination report form.

Perhaps certain guilty ones have beaten these tests. The scare of the accident might well have sobered them up considerably. But the question is: Was this driver intoxicated *at the time of the accident?*

A third method is harder to beat —clinical examination by police surgeon or other physician. These examinations include, sometimes, a general clinical examination for the purpose of distinguishing genuine illness from intoxication.

One of the most effective methods —chemical tests of body fluids or breath—is almost impossible to beat. This method comes within the division of actual scientific crime detection. These chemical tests show specifically the amount of alcohol present in the body fluids. A guilty man who claims that he "just took one drink" is often proved a liar—unless, by rare chance, his one drink was drained from a large bucket, for instance. These tests establish, beyond all doubt, whether alcohol is present in a quantity sufficient to

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cause the impairment indicated in the physical examination. They pin the rap tightly on the guilty, and vindicate the innocent, too; they protect the innocent driver who may be suffering from some injury, or from some illness not caused by alcohol.

Scientific investigators have pointed out and repeatedly verified the fact that the concentration of alcohol in the body fluids is one of the most reliable and objective criteria of intoxication. Many of these investigators have determined the relationship between brain alcohol concentrations and concentrations in spinal fluid, blood and saliva, so that the degree of alcoholic influence can be evaluated closely when the concentration of alcohol in breath or in the body fluids is known.

Mr. X might claim that Mr. Y, who testified that he saw the accident and saw Mr. X driving drunkenly, was prejudiced against him. His claim could even be true. But Mr. X—unless he was still very drunk—would hardly deny the findings of science. The scientists who make the tests have nothing against Mr. X. They don't like him. They don't dislike him. They just are out to arrive at the truth. They are successful in this. And, after these definite tests, intoxicated drivers often change their pleas from not guilty to guilty. They might as well. They can't argue with science.

DISTILLATION equipment and a boiling water bath are used in certain of the scientific tests. The alcoholic content of any body fluid can be preserved almost indefinitely when a preservative is used in the mailing containers. In this way, the sample may be sent to an expert or to the main laboratory.

Harger's Micro-Method is regarded as most satisfactory. This is a method for determining alcohol in extremely small samples of blood or another body fluid. The procedure is a modified bichromate method, the excess of bichromate being titrated directly with a mixture of ferrous sulphate and menthyl orange. Distillation equipment is needed for preliminary distillation of the diluted samples. Titration equipment is very simple. This method is rapid.

Other countries as well as our own have gone in for scientific detection of drunken driving. The Widmark Micro-Method, for the analysis of blood, has been official in Sweden, and was recently adopted in Germany as a mandatory test in traffic accident cases. One or two drops of blood are drawn from the ear lobes or finger tips into specially prepared glass tubes and the percentage of alcohol is determined by a bichromate-iodide method.

A method that has resulted in convictions—and acquittals, too, for the acquittal of an innocent man is just as important as the conviction of a guilty one—is Bogen's Breath Test. This can definitely shoot the light of truth through that frequent claim, "Why, I just had one little drink, judge." The Bogen test will tell just how much was in that "little" drink.

In this method two portions of expired air, collected in a rubber bladder, are bubbled through an acid solution of potassium bichromate. The percentage of alcohol is determined by comparing the color with previously prepared standards. The test is simple; in fact, it can be performed even by an untrained person, provided the apparatus and reagents are made up by a chemist, and provided that control tests are made each time. The results are suffi-

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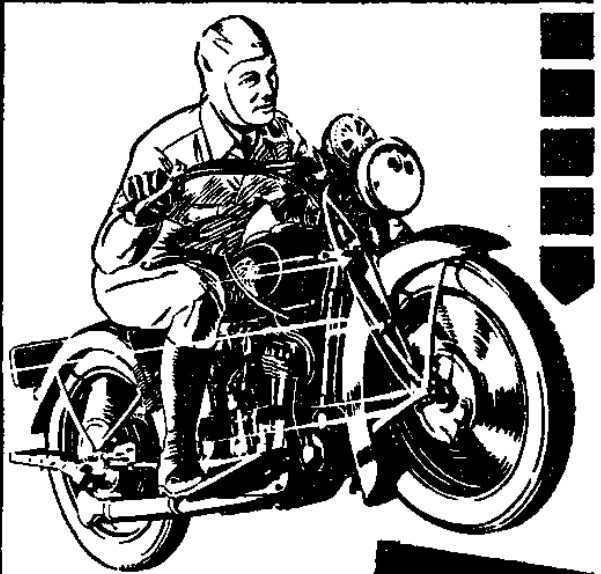

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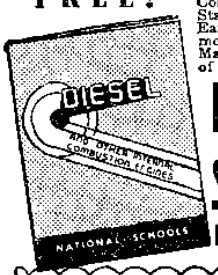

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ciently accurate for clinical or medico-legal use.

The other much-used Breath Test—the Harger Breath Test—can be used for a quick determination of the presence of sufficient alcohol to warrant an arrest. This is said to be a more precise test. A person's breath is drawn through a measured amount of an acid solution of permanganate until the solution changes color. The amount of air used is determined from the weight of the carbon dioxide absorbed in a special absorption tube.

This method is advantageous because the test can be made at room temperature, and—very important—because the sample can be one obtained without even touching the prospect, thus not violating the constitutional right when persons will not co-operate by giving samples. The equipment is easily portable, being inclosed in a 4 x 4 x 8 inch box. The carbon dioxide tube is removable, so weighings can be made at a central laboratory.

THERE are special test methods. The Visual Test is one of them. Tests of vision already have been used to some extent as a means for demonstrating the effects of alcoholic influence. This test is made while the suspected person is under the influence, and results are compared with results of control tests that are made at a later time. Generally it has been found that alcohol affects eye co-ordination and not visual acuity or refractive error.

The motion picture is used, also—regular sound motion pictures, of the type you see in your neighborhood theater. They can't measure the influence of liquor, of course, but they are useful in recording evidence so that it can be presented in court. Pictures taken at the time the driver was apprehended demonstrate effectively the actions that

vary from the normal. Just imagine a driver claiming he hadn't had a drink before the accident, and then sitting down and seeing himself staggering across the screen and yelling, "Shay, whatsha matter here? Whatsha wanna arrest me for? I ain't done nothin'."

Psychology is more and more coming into its own, and psychological testing equipment now is used to a limited extent in traffic clinics of a few cities. Such equipment has been used primarily to measure the characteristics of drivers in their normal condition. There is a possibility, however, that it can be used in evaluating impairment resulting from influence of alcohol, provided control tests are made later for comparison. Psychological tests include those for reaction time, visual acuity, depth perception, peripheral vision, eye-hand co-ordination, speed and distance judgment, and vigilance.

It's practically reached the point where the guilty man can't win. If his tongue is twisted by alcohol, how can he repeat some of the test phrases pulled on him? The word ELECTRICITY often will get him. If he makes the grade on that, probably the authorities will say: "And now repeat METHODIST EPISCOPAL." But even if he can say this, and can repeat ROUND THE RUGGED ROCK THE RAGGED RASCAL RAN, or PETER PIPER PICKED A PECK OF PEPPER, there'll be other barriers to pass. The pupils of his eyes can tell on him. A bright light is flashed in the eyes of the suspect, and the reaction compared with the reaction obtained when a light is flashed in the eyes of another person—a sober person.

His handwriting might tell on him. Maybe he'll be asked to walk a straight line, toe of one foot against the heel of the other, and then turn and walk back again.

There is also a Finger-to-Nose Test. In this test, the suspect stands erect, eyes closed, arms extended horizontally. Then, one hand at a time, he is asked to touch the tip of his nose with the tip of his index finger.

It's helped to convict many an intoxicated driver who started out thumbing his nose at the Law!

When a guilty driver bucks even a few of these tests, he has about as much chance of escaping conviction as he'd have of winning the Irish Sweepstakes with a single ticket.

Drinking in moderation may be a man's own private business. But drinking, and driving an automobile is something else again.

There's one way to play it absolutely safe:

Don't drink at all when driving an automobile.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE: You will find "Tin Soldier," a Carrie Cashin novelette; "The Minks and The Weasels," by Lester Dent; another Jim Strong story; a Red Brennan novelette; a Doc Trouble yarn, and many others—all of them by the best writers, giving you their best stories. Don't fail to get every issue of this great magazine.

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CRIME BUSTERS

SUICIDE FOR KILLERS

Continued from page 84

with a snarl, had turned to face me. I dived for him again. There wasn't anything else to do. He'd have killed me that time.

He was set for the charge, crouched there waiting; but the girl saved me.

Her foot came out, hooked around one of Guido's ankles and jerked sideways. It threw him off balance as he struggled to keep his feet. My hand closed over his gun wrist, forcing it down, and I drove my other fist to his jaw.

That jaw was hard—or maybe there wasn't so much force in the blow. My whole side was numb from the furrow which his bullet had dug there.

His head snapped back, but he didn't go over. He was trying to twist the gun up against my side as I hit him again. Then the cops pounded up the stairs, and flooded into the room.

THE homicide captain stopped and stared, then he looked at me. "What are you, Red? An epidemic?"

The lieutenant said, "He's worse than that. Kroul committed suicide when he ran up against this mug."

I didn't say anything. I wasn't feeling so good. My side had begun to hurt as the mayor came in through the door. He was pretty mad.

He said, "What do you mean by dragging my daughter in here? Haven't you got any sense at all?"

I didn't say anything. There wasn't anything much I could say I *had* dragged her in. I'd used her for bait, to frame a kidnap rap on Kroul. I didn't need the kidnap rap on Kroul. I didn't need the kidnap rap on him now. I didn't need any rap at all. He was dead, but I hadn't been able to figure it that way. I had to get him on something.

Howden had been one of my men—not only one of my men, but a darned good friend of mine; and he'd had a wife and a couple of kids. The wife would be taken care of. I'd chiseled almost twelve thousand dollars from Kroul and Bliss, and I didn't see any reason to turn it in. I was going to stick it in a plain envelope and send it to Howden's widow. That part was all right, but I had dragged Nora Grayson into a lot of danger and she'd been swell.

She'd saved my life twice, then she came to my help again. She was facing her father and she was really telling him off.

She said, "What's the matter with you? Can't you see that Red's got a bullet in his side? He may be dying, and you all stand around not doing anything Someone get an ambulance! Someone get him to the hospital."

I said, "I'm O. K. Don't worry about me."

But she did. She rode to the hospital with me. Pete Ames was in the same ambulance. My kick had broken his jaw, but she wasn't paying any attention to him. On the way, she thought of something.

She made them stop the ambulance so that she could phone. She told her trainer to take Mickie French off her horse and put the regular kid back on. That's the kind of girl she was. She kept her head no matter what happened.

That afternoon she sat in my room at the hospital and we listened in on the radio. Splendor won the race by four lengths.

THE MYSTERIOUS JUGS

Continued from page 52

was still a cloud, and he plunged into the falling particles, fell upon the man in the ski suit. The fellow had lost his gun. Rush had seen it fly away after the blast.

Rush closed with him. The man was taller, also strong, a man who had done a lot of physical work. He wrapped his long arms around Rush, proceeded to demonstrate that he knew something about wrestling. Rush tried to punch his jaw, failed. The man was holding him too close. The fellow brought up a knee. Rush howled. They swapped ends in the snow.

Rush changed his tactics, pushed the end of his necktie in the man's mouth. The man seemed to approve. He bit down on the necktie, proceeded to hold Rush in that fashion, and slam him with fist blows.

From the lake ice, shots came. Two of them. Then four or five—it was impossible to tell how many, because echoes bounced back from the hills and made a great gobbling.

Rush and his foe got to their feet, fell down. They tumbled across the girl, and she began kicking them indiscriminately.

Suddenly, Rush's victim howled. He spat out the necktie end.

But he had been a little too late in discovering that the necktie end

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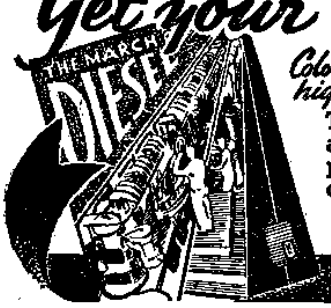

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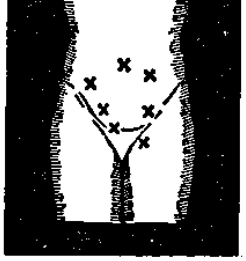

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was loaded with a chemical that would produce abrupt unconsciousness—another of Rush's gadgets.

The man did not go to sleep immediately. He knew he was weakening, so he devoted all his efforts to getting away. Rush let him go, and while the man ran, waded over and kicked around in the snow hopefully for the man's gun.

Before Rush found the gun, one of the men in coonskin coats came charging out of the brush. There was no sign of the other coonskin wearer, or the fourth man in the mackinaw. Bullets chased the runner, whacking the frozen bushes, screaming and knocking down snow.

The runner in the coonskin coat was looking backward fearfully.

Rush had presence of mind to pitch forward in the snow, burying himself. When the runner's footsteps were close to him, he jumped up. The fellow saw him, swung his gun. Lunging, Rush got hold of the weapon with both hands, twisted, and milked it out of the other's clutch.

Rush clubbed the man several times with the gun before he discovered that it was the deep snow that was keeping the fellow on his feet.

The man in the ski suit had stopped and was turning around and around foolishly, and now he fell.

IT was ten o'clock that night, beside a pleasant roaring fire in the town hall, before Rush got his explanations repeated sufficiently that they were believed.

"You see, they grabbed my baggage, and that handicapped me," he explained. "Practically all my gadgets were in the baggage."

"We see everything perfectly," the sheriff said, "except that business about the toad. We don't believe that."

"Skip it, then."

"But it's important—"

"Not half as important to you as to me!" Rush said grimly. "Some day, I'm gonna find out who the voice of that toad is. And boy! What a day that'll be!"

The girl came in. She had both hands full of small glass jugs, and the jugs appeared to contain rock dust. She put the jugs in a suitcase, went out, and came back with more jugs.

"Do I ever learn what those things are?" Rush asked.

She smiled at him. "Didn't the sheriff tell you?"

"He hasn't done anything but listen."

The girl held up one of the jugs. "What does the contents look like?"

Rush said, "Rock dust."

"That's right."

"Huh?"

"The jugs contain core samples," the girl explained.

Rush shook his head, said, "A core sample may make sense to you, but it's just gibberish to me."

"These samples were taken from a well that is being drilled for oil," the young woman elaborated. "Any good geologist can examine them, and tell exactly what strata of rock the well has been drilled through at any given depth—and from that, judge very accurately whether there is a chance of hitting oil."

"That makes them valuable, eh?"

"Of course. Rival oil operators, if they have these samples, can tell whether land around our wildcat test well is worth leasing. These core samples can make several hundred thousand dollars for lease speculators. We have a sure-fire well. These samples prove it. Those men who were after them were lease speculators."

"Where is this test well?"

"In Kansas."

Rush asked, "Then what were the samples doing in a plane headed for New York?"

"Our geologist," the girl explained, "is in New York. The samples were being rushed to him. He needed them to prove how good the test is, so our company could borrow some money."

She finished carrying in the jugs, and made a last trip, on which she brought a sheaf of greenbacks—the twenty thousand dollars—which she tucked in the suitcase with the jugs of core samples.

"That goes, too?" Rush asked ruefully.

"Of course. The money belonged to Crownblock—his life's savings. He was going to invest them in the company when he got to New York, he had explained."

Rush was of the private opinion that the idea of so much trouble over core samples was slightly screwy, but kept the idea to himself, for the reason that he considered his own inventions as perfectly sensible, whereas everyone else thought they were wacky, which might mean that his judgment was askew.

A deputy sheriff came in, holding an envelope and looking puzzled.

"We found this under the door," he said.

It was addressed to Rush. The envelope contained a ten-thousand-dollar bill—the sum that came to him from Bufa, the voice of the toad, each time he solved an unusual crime.

Rush yelled, "Blast it!" and rushed out and began hunting around in the snow for tracks that Bufa might have left.

As he expected, he did not find any footprints that he could follow.

"Some day," Rush muttered, "one of these messes is going to end differently."

MURDER IN WAX

Continued from page 20

glance toward the tunnel. No one was in sight. She turned her head, stared past the advancing robot. She saw the dummy figure of Uncle Tom, but the real shape of Simon Legree was no longer in that exhibit which stood at the end of the passage opposite the Bluebeard den!

THE robot hit the wall, clicked about, and began its return. Again Miriam heard the whisper—one that she had to believe, since it had been true before:

"Break loose. Make for the maze!"

Breaking loose was not difficult. The bonds that held Miriam Laymond, alias Marie Antoinette, were formidable only because they could hold her long enough for the guillotine to be dropped. But with the lookout gone, there wasn't any chance that the knife would fall. Working hard, Miriam snapped the thin chains that held her wrists, then worked the others down from her ankles and over her shoeless feet.

There were voices from the tunnel. Frantically, Miriam scrambled out from behind the guillotine and made for the turnstile into the maze. As she wheeled through it, she looked along the passage. The robot figure was gone, but, to her amazement, Simon Legree was back!

The girl could still see the blue-lit passage from the crossbars of the maze. Then, as she went through another turnstile, hands suddenly gripped her. Before she could scream, she was clamped in a strong grip. A hand was held across her mouth; a voice, friendly enough, whispered that she should keep quiet.

Wier was coming out, past Bluebeard, with his mob at his heels. They were carrying bags, two to a man, Boots hauling a pair of satchels like the rest. Wier was pointing the way by the long route through the passages, when suddenly Boots questioned:

"Where's the dame?"

Wier gave a snarl. Looking along the passage, he called in a low tone that echoed back at him:

"Hey, Klinky!"

He was talking to the figure of Simon Legree, but it did not answer. Wier dropped one bag and pulled a revolver. The rest copied his move. Staring steadily, Wier asked the others:

"What's happened to that dummy that was walking around here? It's quit!"

Almost in answer, a figure swung past the turn of the corridor, but it wasn't uniformed as an attendant. The form that paced into view was that of a uniformed officer, gun in hand. Behind him poked others, who stood back, letting their leader advance. Before any of the police could shout, "Stick 'em up!" Wier gave the rasped order to his own mob:

"It's the cops! Give it!"

The whole crew gave it, as they surged forward. The police began to sprawl like dummy figures—which they were. When Wier and his outfit came upon them, it was too late. They were past the turn in the corridor. From that spot came a drive of real police, in plain-clothes, who opened an effective barrage of gunfire.

Fleeing back along the passage, Wier and a few others made toward the tunnel. Shouts came from the hewn cavity. Uniformed policemen —not dummies this time—came into

sight, using their revolvers. With more of his band dropping behind him, Wier made for the only outlet, the mystic maze.

The men beside Miriam arose. Their flashlights bored into the blue glow of the Horror Chamber. When Wier tried to shoot, they riddled him. Then gun echoes died. Amid the groans of wounded crooks came the screech of Boots, the only one of the mob who had dodged the fire to be captured by a trio of detectives.

TAKEN to the main hall on the ground floor, Miriam gave a glad cry when she saw Norgil, removing the costume of an attendant, which he had put over his own clothes. His arms received a very weepy young lady, who still wore the plain black dress and stockings that belonged to the dummy, Marie Antoinette.

"We knew what they were up to," explained Norgil. "I came in again, packed in the crates, with half a dozen headquarters men. In order to see how things were going, I put on an attendant's uniform and took the place of the walking robot."

"But . . . but—" Miriam was stammering, amazed. "What about Simon Legree?"

"We covered the maze, of course," returned Norgil, "and found the dummy there. Klinky was wearing a duplicate outfit. All I did was pick him out while he was staring at Uncle Tom, and tap him one under the ear. He wasn't paying any attention to the walking robot."

"But the police—"

"The ones that got shot? They were the moving dummies, headed by the real robot. We brought in some uniforms and togged them up in those."

Miriam didn't ask about the men who had awaited her in the maze. She knew that they were detectives.

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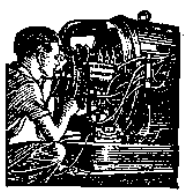

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She also knew that it was Norgil who had spoken to her while passing. She wanted to know more about that. He told her.

"You didn't go to the hotel," he said. "I knew then that you had found the message. I was looking for you, and I saw you, because you watched me pass. Besides, we found a kneeling dummy up in the Hall of History, along with extra shoes, and this"—he dangled a wrist watch —"was on the shelf. I guess"—he smiled as he eyed Miriam's costume —"they took everything else you had worn, but they overlooked this. You left a wide trail, like Wier."

"Like Wier?"

Norgil nodded.

"I wasn't bluffed," he said. "Wier was losing too much money. That looked phony. There wasn't any red ink on his desk when I was up there earlier. But there were a lot of programs. Funny they ran short of them, wasn't it?"

"No"—Norgil became reflective— "it wasn't funny after all. Wier didn't want any more programs given out for fear someone would check on that St. Valentine's Day massacre set and see one body too many."

Congratulations were coming Norgil's way. Detectives were telling him that he could expect a reward for having halted the huge robbery at Clafley's. The manager was coming to his hotel, they added, to talk the whole case over. Norgil smiled at Miriam.

"Do you know," said the magician, with a smile, "I might have let Wier get away with murder—but never with that robbery."

"Why not?" asked Miriam incredulously.

"You'll find out"—Norgil's smile was elusive—"some day soon."

By some day soon, Norgil meant next Wednesday—her birthday.

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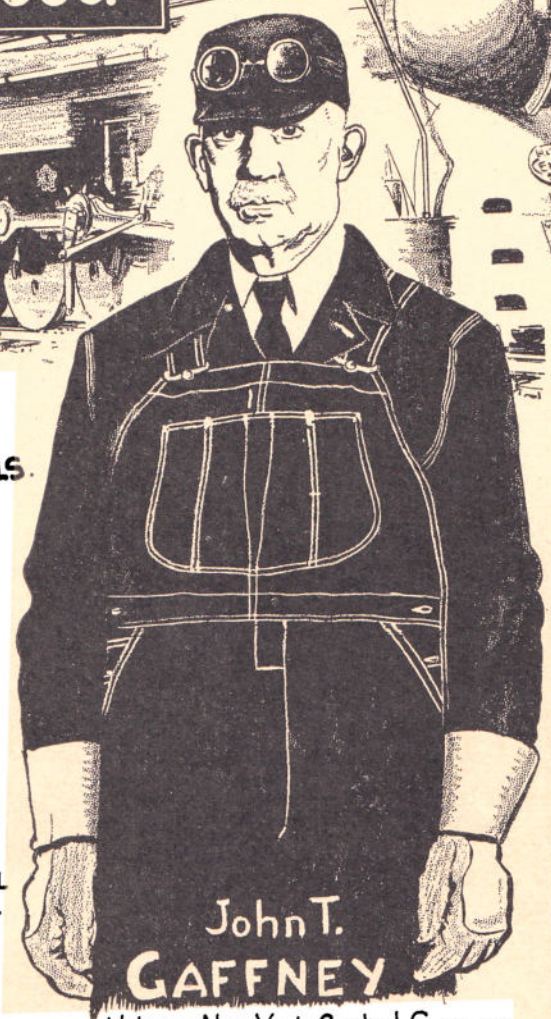

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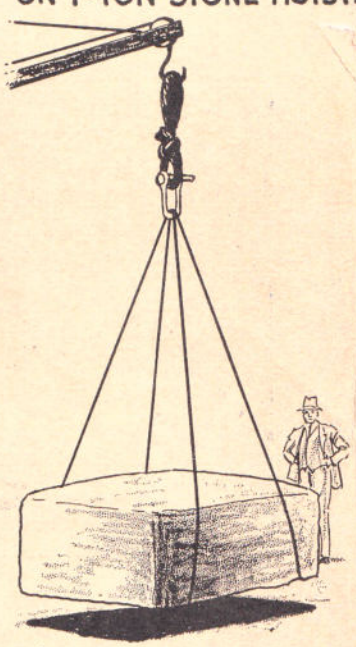

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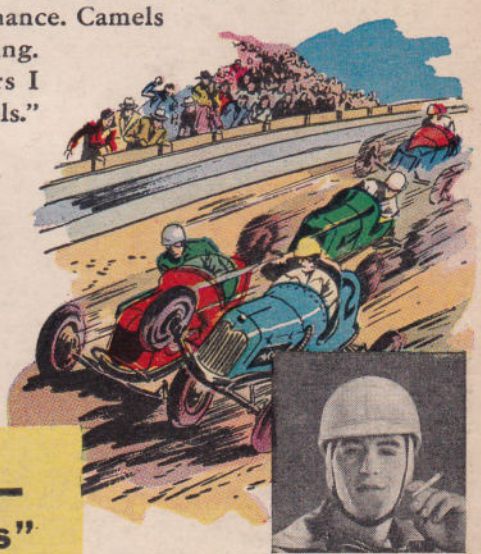
WATCH YOUR NERVES

LET UP—LIGHT UP A CAMEL

BAREBACK RIDING TITLES fall to rodeo star Carl Dossey (*left*) because of his splendid muscular control and the fact that he keeps his mind one jump ahead of the "bronc." But that means plenty of good old-fashioned nerve strain for Carl. "It's tough, exciting work," says he, "that would soon get my nerves jittery if I didn't ease off regularly. It's a rule with me to let up—light up a Camel every time I get a chance. Camels are mighty comforting. Most cow-punchers I know go for Camels."



"AT TWO MILES A MINUTE on a dirt track anything can happen!" says Ernest Gesell, Jr. (*right*), who won a National Circuit Championship in midget auto-racing. "Skids, crashes put a big strain on my nerves." Naturally, Ernie values steady nerves. And it's a rule with him to give his nerves frequent rests—to let up—light up a Camel.

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JOAN NELLIGAN is a proof-reader. Like so many other people in every-day occupations, she doesn't live a hazardous life, but there's plenty of nerve strain in the kind of close work she does. She concentrates intensely to keep mistakes from getting into print. Her rule for resting her nerves is this: "When I feel 'nerve fag' coming on," she says, "I let up—light up a Camel. Camels soothe my nerves. I can smoke as many as I please. Camels are so mild. They never tire my taste!"

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